THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

The Role of Scotland's Colleges: Balancing Economic and Social Objectives

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1/1/2012

Abstract

Recent Scottish Government policy has increasingly emphasised lifelong learning as the means of developing the nation's skills and employability. Colleges are frequently presented as the key driver of widening access to lifelong learning in Scotland and are expected to provide effective responses to both social and economic problems. This research focuses on the balance struck in government policy in relation to Scotland's colleges with regard to social and economic objectives and how this policy is mediated in three diverse colleges. Utilising case studies of three colleges in Scotland, this study found that the economic focus of the Scottish Government, coupled with the market values of the college sector following the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, has resulted in some colleges emphasising economic priorities at the cost of social objectives. College education is presented as the bridge to the labour market and this has resulted in students equating college learning with acquiring the necessary qualifications to obtain employment. In the larger colleges (both the result of recent mergers) social network development is treated as a by-product rather than a central objective and the connections made by students tend to be confined to narrow subject areas. Learning at these colleges is compartmentalised, so that students develop 'bonding' rather than 'bridging' social capital, which may narrow rather than widen their horizons (Putnam, 2000). Pursuit of funding initiatives and performance indicators at the larger colleges led to tensions amongst staff members over the loss of community focus and, in the case of one college, a significant increase in learners under 16. The smaller college exhibited a clear community focus, allowing for greater levels of social interaction. It is suggested that colleges need to develop further their role as generators of social, as well as human, capital.

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Glossary of Terms

CAP – Community Access Programme
EEA – European Economic Area
EMA – Education Maintenance Allowance
ESF – European Structural Fund
ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages
EU – European Union
FE – Further Education
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
HE – Higher Education
HEI – Higher Education Institution
HNC – Higher National Certificate
HND – Higher National Diploma
ICT – Information and Communications Technology
MCMC – More Choices, More Chances (formerly NEET)
NEET – Young people aged 16-19 not in employment, education or training
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SCQF – Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SFC – Scottish Funding Council
SUM – Student Unit of Measurement

Acknowledgements

Although this thesis is ultimately credited to one person, it would not have been possible without the help and support of a number of individuals and I would like to specifically acknowledge those individuals who have played a crucial role in the completion of this research.

I would like to give my thanks to my PhD supervisors at Moray House, Professor Sheila Riddell and Dr Elisabet Weedon, not only for challenging and supporting me throughout this process but also for their guidance every step of the way. Their hard work and advice has been essential in steering me back onto the correct path when I could so easily have wandered off time and time again. The skills I have learned during my research and my time spent working with the Centre for Research in Equality, Inclusion and Diversity have proved invaluable and will no doubt continue to serve me well in any future endeavours.

I would like to thank my family for the support they have given me throughout this process. In particular my parents, who have always been there for me and continue to provide a voice of reason whenever things conspire to get on top of me. Without their never-ending faith and patience this thesis would not have been possible. Thanks also to my brothers and their families for continuing to show an interest in the political ramifications of the Scottish college sector when they should by rights have been bored to death a long time ago.

I would also like to thank the other members of staff and students at Moray House, particularly the staff at the Centre for Research in Education, Inclusion and Diversity for their advice and encouragement. A feeling of community is essential to feeling at ease and many

of my fellow PhD students work hard to ensure that the students feel part of a community. This hard work also extends to the many members of staff who help organise various conferences, seminars and other opportunities for the students to socialise and share ideas about their research. The students at Moray House are very fortunate to have such a team of committed individuals who strive to ensure that although PhD research can be a very individual pursuit, it does not have to be a solitary one.

Finally, I would like to thank Louise for her patience, understanding, encouragement and support.

1. SETTING THE SCENE

1.1 Introduction

Scotland's colleges play an integral role in modern Scottish society, providing lifelong learning, education, training and skills to thousands of people each year. For decades colleges have been trusted with providing opportunities for people, no matter their background, to improve their life chances. What Grubb and Lazerson describe as the 'Education Gospel' expresses a faith in education as the principal route to "economic growth and competitiveness, individual advancement, social inclusion and equity" (Grubb and Lazerson, 2004, p 23). Scotland's colleges have to react to changes in government policy and respond to the ever changing needs of the labour market. Post-compulsory education in Scotland has expanded greatly in recent decades (Paterson, 2003), and colleges have varied in their interpretation and implementation of government policy. This thesis explores the way in which government policy on lifelong learning, encompassing human and social capital objectives, plays out in different ways in diverse colleges.

The college sector in Scotland has undergone many changes since its inception in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Throughout its development, the college sector has been charged with supporting the Scottish economy. This has tended to consist of equipping individuals with the skills necessary for technical occupations. However, in the second half of the twentieth century, as lifelong learning began to be viewed in more humanistic terms (Faure et al., 1972), increased focus was placed on education as a means of increasing social inclusion, advancement and self-fulfilment. This chapter begins with a short history of the college sector, examining the diversity of the different institutions and the way their identity

has been shaped by their industrial origins and later by policies associated with incorporation and marketization. This is followed by a discussion of the way in which colleges construct their identity through their culture, marketing and branding. The research aims and questions which this study will address are then outlined. This chapter will conclude by outlining the structure of the thesis, detailing the contents of the individual chapters.

1.2 A short history of Scotland's colleges

1.2.1 The origins of the Scottish college sector

Educational provision in Scotland is dominated by four large sectors – primary schooling, secondary schooling, further education colleges, and higher education institutions (Paterson, 2003). Further education colleges, formerly known as 'technical colleges', can trace their roots back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when many were founded in an attempt to address Britain's perceived competitive deficiency of that period. The standard of education was believed to be responsible for the loss of Britain's economic superiority (Sanderson, 1999). The Scottish technical colleges of the early twentieth century developed in order to provide vocational education to the local population with some colleges able to trace their heritage back to the mechanical institutes of the nineteenth century. They were geared towards meeting the training needs of the Scottish manufacturing industry, equipping young people, mostly young men, with the apprentice training to work in traditional industries, particularly heavy industry in the central belt. Colleges in other areas developed according to the area's local industry, leading to the development of institutions with very varied cultures. Colleges in the Scottish Borders focused on textiles whereas colleges in Glasgow based the majority of their provision on the local ship-building industry. The

leading colleges of this period were known as central institutions and were financed directly by the Scottish Education Department (Anderson, 2003). The majority of colleges were funded by their local authorities. Education has traditionally been viewed by the Scottish public as one of the three main institutions which mark the culture of Scotland as distinctive from that of the rest of the United Kingdom, particularly England (the other two being the law and the Church). Scottish education has developed a distinct identity due to the separate legislative framework which outlines the nature of provision and the agencies responsible for its delivery (Humes and Bryce, 2003, p 108). Scotland (1969) suggested six propositions which encapsulated the Scottish attitude towards education:

- Education is, and always has been, of paramount importance in any community.
- Every child should have the right to all the education of which he [sic] is capable.
- Such education should be provided as economically and systematically as possible
- The training of the intellect should take priority over all other facets of the pupil's personality
- Experiment is to be attempted only with the greatest caution
- The most important person in the school, no matter what the theorists say, is not the pupil but the (inadequately rewarded) teacher (Scotland, 1969, p 275).

1.2.2 The expansion of post-compulsory education

After 1945 it was evident that there was a need for expansion at the post-secondary level to cope with the increasing numbers of students in both universities and technical colleges. Full-time and degree-level work was encouraged, and adult education was combined with local technical education to become 'further education' (Anderson, 2003). Further education

continued to grow into the 1950s and the publication of the White Paper *Technical Education* (Ministry of Education, 1956) which covered England, Wales and Scotland, brought about significant increases in resources for further education leading to increased capital spending on college facilities - £12 million over five years with a further £3.5 million in 1959 (Cooke, 2006, p 152). Educational expansion at the post-school level continued throughout the 1960s when there was a steady growth in attendance at universities and further education colleges. A further White Paper *Technical Education in Scotland* (Ministry of Education, 1961) recommended increased expansion throughout the 1960s and 1970s and called for a strategy for a training structure to support the growing Scottish economy. From 1957 to 1972, over 30 new further education colleges were built in Scotland (Cooke, 2006, p 152). The further education sector in Scotland grew rapidly from 700 full-time staff in 1956 to around 4,000 in 1970 based in 80 colleges and centres throughout Scotland (Cooke, 2006, p 152). The expansion of education in the 1970s was due in part to the collapse of the youth labour market. Rather than proceeding directly from school to employment, more young people were moving into post-school education. This expansion resulted in a sector that was increasingly varied and complex.

1.2.3 Developing diverse cultures

The diverse histories of the colleges led to the development of institutions with very varied cultures. Local authorities preserved these cultures by avoiding competition and duplication of provision with nearby institutions. Simmons describes the college sector in England under local authority control as variable and states that this "variability existed at a number of levels: between different authorities; within different authorities; and even between different departments within individual colleges" (Simmons, 2008, p 361). Although Simmons was

referring to the college sector in England, the same could be said of the sector in Scotland during its expansion from 1945 onwards. Each local authority contributed to the individual character of the colleges under its control, seeking to produce workers for its local economy and industry. The local environment also played a large part in shaping the character of the college. The nearby presence of local schools, other colleges and universities also had an effect on the educational character of the institution.

1.2.4 Incorporation and its effects on college identity

The Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 had a major impact on the development of Scotland's colleges. All but two of the forty-five further education colleges became independent bodies removed from the governance of local authorities, a move which came to be known as 'incorporation' (the two small colleges in Orkney and Shetland remained with their local authorities). This change was in line with the then Conservative UK Government's desire to introduce a more business management style into the public sector. Despite remaining publicly funded by the Scottish Government through the Scottish Further Education Funding Council or SFEFC (later to become the Scottish Funding Council), colleges were now individual corporate bodies, each operating as a distinct enterprise with a board of management which became the statutory body and the formal employer for all staff working within the college (Thomson, 2003). The White Paper *Education and Training for the 21st Century* stated that the most effective way to reform the college sector was to use market mechanisms to raise the standards and reduce costs of public services (DES/ED, 1991). Incorporation effectively "forced colleges to operate under a system of state capitalism rather than in an environment of private enterprise" (Simmons, 2008, p 363). Post-incorporation, colleges were forced to broaden their remit and provide a wider range of

options for an increasing number of students. As was noted earlier, local authorities had sought to discourage duplication. Following incorporation, colleges were forced to compete with each other for the same body of students which led to them increasingly offered the same range of courses. Rather than encouraging diversity, this move resulted in many colleges becoming increasingly similar. The corporate nature of the college sector has been described as "characterised by uniformity in image, rhetoric and organisational behaviours" (Levin, 2002, p 129). As a result they tended to lose their individual mission and identity and arguably became less efficient due to wasteful duplication.

1.2.5 New Labour, the Scottish Parliament and increased investment in education

In the second half of the 1990s, the further education sector was facing significant reductions in real levels of overall funding alongside a declining level of funding for individual learners. Following the election of a Labour government in 1997, education attained a much higher profile, attracting increasing levels of government funding. After the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the Labour-led Scottish Executive also allocated increased funding to the Scottish college sector. The late 1990s saw a growing emphasis on the promotion of lifelong learning and the creation of a learning society (Edwards, 1997). Colleges were recognised as having a central role in establishing the learning society in Scotland and in the UK. Colleges were urged to extend and enhance their contribution to economic development and social inclusion by widening access to tertiary education (see Chapter 2 for further discussion of this concept). In 2007, following the election of a minority SNP government, the Scottish Executive was re-branded as the Scottish Government. Throughout this thesis, the term 'Scottish Government' will be used to refer to both the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Government.

1.2.6 The changing nature of college provision

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, major changes took place in the labour market. Jobs demanding high level skills increased, and the number of low skilled jobs contracted. Responding to these economic changes, the Scottish and UK Governments increasingly emphasised the salience of lifelong learning, and the role of the colleges in up-skilling the population (Grubb, 2005). As discussed earlier, post-incorporation, colleges were encouraged to diversify and become increasingly flexible, widening the range of courses on offer in a bid to increase student numbers. Colleges offered an enormous range of activities which included: post-compulsory vocational education; opportunities to re-take high school exams; higher education courses in partnership with local universities; occupational courses for 14-16 year-olds; adult education; and training for employers.

Increased funding succeeded in highlighting the role of the college sector in increasing participation in lifelong learning, however, additional funds also led to increased demand for colleges to increase productivity and efficiency (Thomson, 2003). The main challenge faced by Scotland's colleges today is in maintaining and developing its provision to constantly adjust to the ever-changing requirements of employers and the targets of the Scottish Government. Scotland's colleges contribute significantly to the training of the Scottish workforce and the Scottish Government's lifelong learning agenda with a substantial number of enrolments across the working age population. In the academic year 2008/09, 39 per cent of college enrolments for those of working age had a direct link to business with this ratio having remained fairly constant for the previous six years. However, the percentage of college activity aimed at the working age population has decreased in recent years from over

215,000 enrolments linked to employment in 2005-06 to 198,533 in 2008-09. In 2005-06, 111,136 of these enrolments were at least partly funded by the employer. This figure has also experienced a recent decline, dropping to 96,640 in 2008-09 (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010). As the fieldwork for this thesis was carried out in 2009, the statistics used in this section consist of data up to and including the academic year 2008/09. The Scottish Government has highlighted the crucial role colleges can play in up-skilling the working age population and the importance of employer-funded education and training (Scottish Government, 2007a).

1.2.7 Funding Scotland's colleges

Another important aspect of the history of Scotland's colleges has been the changing identity of the funding bodies. Following incorporation in 1992, funding for the various FE colleges in Scotland came directly from the Scottish Office. The Scottish Further Education Funding Council was created on 1st January 1999, working in shadow form until it formally assumed its responsibilities on 1st July of that year. Further education is the responsibility of the devolved Scottish Parliament and was placed under the remit of the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning which also included the economy, transport, energy and science as well as higher education and lifelong learning (Thomson, 2003). In April 2004, the Scottish Executive began consultations to merge the Scottish Further Education Funding Council and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council with the intention to achieve greater parity of value between further and higher education. The paper, *A Changing Landscape for Tertiary Education and Research in Scotland*, also proposed to bring the two definitions together, using the term 'tertiary' to refer to post-compulsory education. The responses to the consultation were published in October 2004 and the proposal received support for the merger in principle. There was, however, opposition to the use of the term 'tertiary

education' as it was felt that it would not be sufficiently understood by the wider public and that it failed to recognise the distinctive roles of the two sectors (Scottish Executive, 2004d). This discussion resulted in the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 which led to the creation of the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, more commonly known as the Scottish Funding Council or SFC, which was established on 3rd October 2005.

The SFC replaced the two previous councils and brought together funding and support for Scotland's colleges and universities under the one body. The SFC is responsible for funding teaching and learning provision, research and other activities in Scotland's 43 colleges and 20 universities and higher education institutions (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010). Scotland's colleges receive the majority of their funding from the Scottish Funding Council. Other sources of funding for colleges include tuition fees and education grants and contracts, research grants and contracts, endowment and investment income. The SFC is a Non-Departmental Public Body of the Scottish Government and is also the main source of statistical information regarding Scotland's colleges. The Scottish Government can use the power it wields through the SFC to encourage colleges to target specific groups and initiatives by making more funding available for specific types of provision. Colleges in Scotland deliver a range of provision including further education, courses leading to higher education qualifications (mainly Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and Higher National Certificates (HNCs), and specialist provision (older adults, people with English as a second language, learners with additional support needs). Although colleges experienced an increase in autonomy post-incorporation, they are in reality subject to a great degree of control by the Scottish Government through the Scottish Funding Council's funding mechanism. The SFC is crucial to the way colleges are managed in terms of funding and quality control.

Despite the colleges becoming individual corporate bodies, the Scottish Government has continued to influence provision through the Scottish Funding Council. Far from becoming more diverse as a result of incorporation, the effect of the SFC funding regime and growing competition for the same group of students has led to increasing levels of homogenisation. Incorporation introduced a form of funding by results which placed the spotlight upon student retention and achievement. Colleges are expected to demonstrate the quality of their provision through student participation and retention, customer satisfaction reviews and annual college reports (Johnston, 1999). A range of performance indicators are used as part of the accountability process. These indicators form part of a highly managerialist regime, bringing further business practices to the college sector. This provides a strong mechanism for homogenisation. Funds may be "clawed back" by the SFC if colleges fail to reach targets which often consist of student retention or course completion rates (Shain and Gleeson, 1999, p 447). Leech (1999) argues that colleges are local institutions which thrive on civic pride and their capacity to reach the local community. However, performance indicator targets do not include wider community development targets but rather focus on the drive towards a qualified workforce.

1.2.8 The Griggs Review and what this means for the future of the college sector in Scotland

The college sector in Scotland currently exists in a state of flux after the publication of the *Report of the Review of Further Education Governance in Scotland*. This report looks at the college sector in Scotland from a business management point of view and was conducted by Professor Russel Griggs, who is currently lead reviewer of the banks appeals processes and was chair of the Confederation of British Industry SME Council from 2008-10. Griggs was

invited to undertake the report by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. The aim of this report was to identify the optimum governance for the college sector by recommending how the sector as a whole should be managed across Scotland and how each college or entity should be governed. The Griggs Review was published after the Scottish Government report *Putting Learners at the Centre – Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education* (Scottish Government, 2011) which set out a new structure for the college sector in Scotland based on a regional model. The Griggs Report accepts that a regional model where the current sector (37 Boards of Management of incorporated colleges and a further four colleges which are not incorporated) would be governed by twelve regional boards (since revised to thirteen). The SFC would remain as the main funder, able to impose restrictions and rules on the organisations being funded.

Griggs states that the current structure of the college sector, the result of incorporation, has resulted in a number of inequalities between the colleges. The structure which followed the 1992 Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act has not been re-examined since that time. The Report is careful not to criticise incorporation stating "whether the decision in 1992 to introduce the current arrangement was right or wrong in a sense is a fruitless discussion" (Griggs, 2012, p 10). The aim of the Review was to determine whether it is still fit for purpose. According to Griggs, incorporation was set up to allow colleges to be free, independent and create their own future. However, I would argue that rather than finding freedom in incorporation, the colleges found greater competition for students, forced marketization and a gradual loss of individual identity. The Griggs Review highlights over twenty "inequalities" such as surpluses, reserves, salaries and conditions, income streams, financial health, business and community links, student bursaries and commercial expansion which it argues can be addressed by a more structured system of governance. Other

inequalities reported such as estates, community deprivation, size and community reputation, which the report also states can be addressed by a new system of governance, could more likely be attributed to the history and development of the colleges since incorporation. Griggs states that since 1992, colleges have been left to develop in their own way which is described as "haphazard and not controlled or managed in any way" (Griggs, 2012, p 19). This may not be due to incorporation but the product of over 100 years of history and culture. The college sector has responded to the proposals in the Griggs Review, supporting the reform agenda but describing the recommendations as being "of greater magnitude and significance than incorporation (letter from Scotland's Colleges to Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, 24th Feb, 2012). The college sector is also keen to point out that consideration is required with regard to the great diversity between regions in terms of size and geography – 'one size does not fit all'.

What this means for the future of the college sector is uncertain. Although this review was published after the research conducted within this thesis, it is of vital importance to the future of the college sector. The Griggs Review raises questions regarding the extent of cultural diversity which is desirable within the college sector, and it is not clear whether the reduction in the number of colleges which is proposed will make the colleges more homogenous.

1.3 Culture, identity and brand image

1.3.1 The concepts of culture and identity when applied to colleges

The culture of an institution is defined by a common set of rules or assumptions which guide behaviour (Leist, 2007). Kuh and Whitt (1988) define the culture of a college or university as:

> *The collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behaviour of individuals and groups in an institute of higher education and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus (pp 12-13).*

The culture of the college is inexorably bound up with the wider social, political, moral and economic context in which it is located. The identity of a college has more to do with its core values and principles which guide the institutions priorities and strategic direction. The staff, students and local community all have an impact on the identity of a college. The identity of a college is shaped by its culture but the culture is also shaped by the identity. This iterative relationship is the key to defining the college and has a bearing on the how lifelong learning policy is enacted within the colleges. The college management are aware that they need to promote their own institutional culture and identity whilst adhering to Scottish Government policy objectives. Questions arise as to how particular colleges reconcile their own institutional identity and culture with government policy. Colleges need to decide how they project the image of what type of institution they are, and how they are going to sell it to the students. This 'commodification of learning' promotes the college as a business, focusing on what it can sell to the learner.

1.3.2 Promoting and marketing colleges

Although the college sector has always involved aspects of marketing and branding to a certain degree through open days and prospectuses, the climate of the sector post-incorporation has resulted in many colleges drastically increasing their marketing behaviours. College culture and identity have become increasingly commodified. Colleges have been encouraged to package themselves in ways which will attract students. This may take away from the more important work of following through on the institutions' priorities. As a result, colleges run the risk of focusing more on their brand image than their learning image. As discussed earlier, the market-led principles of the post-incorporation college sector have resulted in increased competition for students which the colleges need in order to secure funds which are dependent upon successful recruitment and retention. Many colleges increasingly turned towards marketing as the means to publicise their courses and gain a competitive advantage in a crowded and increasingly competitive marketplace (Maguire et al., 1999). Over the last few decades, many colleges have set up specific marketing and enterprise departments, headed by specialist marketing managers who often have no educational background (Maguire et al., 1999). Advertising revenues have increased and colleges now publicise their courses in a much broader range of media and in a far more 'professional manner' than in the past (Shain and Gleeson, 1999).

The discourses of the promotion and marketing of the college sector support the view that participation in lifelong learning is the result of a rational choice. This assumes that students select a course at college based on what they feel are most appropriate to their current situation and future aspirations. The college therefore has to present the students with a 'reason-why' they should choose that college. In locations where there is limited competition

between institutions then this form of marketing may not be necessary. The notion of 'choice' is problematic as it may not be the same for all students. Some may avoid choice and others may simply not have a choice. Making a choice is also more complicated than perusing a few prospectuses. Other factors such as the destination of peers, the reputation of the college and the facilities on offer can influence the students' decision (Maguire et al., 1999). However, due to a limited supply of students and more competitive funding arrangements, college managers have increasingly becoming more pro-active in student recruitment and retention. In an effort to preserve some semblance of individual identity potentially lost to over-marketing, colleges have turned to the concept of branding in order to almost artificially preserve their identity and mission which was lost after incorporation.

Following incorporation, many institutions faced a conflict in identity, morphing from local colleges to institutions that are more entrepreneurial and corporate as well as more internationally-focused. Colleges, functioning as corporate bodies, require a corporate identity. A corporate identity is the branding and packaging of an entire company. This packaging gives shape to the contents and a way of communicating the ingredients to target groups and markets (Diefenbach, 1999). It projects the unique personality of the organisation and positions the college in the marketplace. A corporate identity can be a powerful strategic weapon. Colleges are increasingly using the techniques of marketing to promote themselves which can distract attention from the core values of the institution. These techniques are used to promote an image, not a substantial culture or identity.

1.3.3 Developing a brand

A brand is a name, an image or a description of an organisation that captures the essence of the value that the organisation provides (Frederick, Austin and Draper, 2000). The function of a brand is to distinguish the goods of one producer from those of another (Murphy, 1992). A successful brand tips the balance in favour of the producer which in this case would be the college. Branding is about creating distinctiveness in a consumer relevant fashion (Murphy, 1992). Developing a brand name, or indeed the name of a college, performs a number of key roles. It identifies the college and allows potential students to reject or recommend the brand. It can be used to communicate a message to the consumer. It functions as a piece of legal property in which stakeholders can invest and which, through time, can become a valuable asset (Murphy, 1992).

How the college promotes its brand can have an impact on the local community. Toma, Dubrow and Hartley (2005), examining the experience of community colleges in the USA, describe how the idea of brand loyalty can foster a sense of community, identification with, and bonding to an institution. The local community can help create and maintain a brand image by maintaining the reputation of the college and creating a desirable condition. Brand loyalty is about establishing familiarity, authority and legitimacy. Certain colleges will have local reputations (whether good or bad) or may be known for certain areas of provision or for particular types of students. A certain local hierarchy may exist among the colleges where a degree of brand loyalty may be established over time. However, this knowledge is unevenly distributed and where competition is intense (post-incorporation) marketing is necessary to widen catchment areas or attract a new generation of students (Maguire et al., 1999).

1.3.4 The identity of college staff

The social characteristics and identity of the staff can play a large part in defining the culture of the college. In the years before incorporation staff in colleges, particularly those in senior positions were largely men who had technical and industrial backgrounds. This reflected the manual roots of the college sector. FE teachers tended to be influenced by their vocational background rather than their position as teachers, instead regarding themselves as engineers or builders. College staff identified their role as "socialising students into occupational cultures and values" (Simmons, 2008, p 366). As these teachers were drawn directly from industry, this afforded the college meaningful links with local employers. Colleges can provide educational opportunities tailored to the local population as well as support for small businesses. The capacity to train employees can also serve to attract small business to an area where there is a college (Miller and Tuttle, 2007). Departments tended to be separate with little communication between individual departments. Ainley and Bailey (1997) describe this system as almost feudal in nature, with departments battling for resources, space and recognition. Following incorporation, staff members have had to deal with significantly increased workloads, stagnated pay conditions and reduced levels of professional autonomy (Simmons, 2008). This is coupled with additional pressures to reach targets set by performance indicators and the need to achieve TQFE qualifications. The discourse of management has led to senior managers in the college sector being regarded as chief executives as opposed to their pre-incorporation roles as chief academics and senior administrators (Simmons, 2008, p 364). Increasing financial pressures and the need to operate as a business has led to the senior management in colleges spending increasing amounts of time on activities such as marketing, accounting, human resources and estates management.

These activities were previously attended to by the local authorities (Johnston, 2003, p 630-1).

I will now outline the main research aims and questions this thesis will address.

1.4 Research aims and questions

Grubb refers to the college sector as the "Cinderella of British education" as it is often overlooked and receives less attention in terms of writing and research than universities (Grubb, 2005, p 23). The problem this research seeks to address is how recent Scottish lifelong learning policy is understood and enacted in three different colleges, with a particular focus on the way in which different colleges balance social and economic objectives.

During the course of this research project, the following research questions will be addressed:

Overarching research question

- What is government policy in relation to Scotland's colleges with regard to social and economic objectives and how is this policy mediated differently in three diverse colleges?

Sub questions

- Within government policy, how are human and social capital objectives balanced?
- How do particular colleges reconcile their own institutional identity and culture with government policy?

- How has government policy on educating young students been adopted in each college?

1.5 Structure

Chapter 2 begins with an examination of the way in which lifelong learning is understood through academic literature and in policy texts. This includes an examination of the various conceptions of lifelong learning as a generator of human capital, a generator of social capital and as a form of social control. The chapter will then examine how these different conceptions have influenced the development of lifelong learning policy in Scotland and in wider UK and EU policy. Chapter 3 explores to what extent recent lifelong learning policy from the Scottish Government has affected the Scottish college sector. This chapter also presents patterns and trends using statistics from the Scottish Funding Council in order to present a comparative and contextual background for the research findings. Chapter 4 presents the research methodology and methods used in this research including a clear justification for selecting the research participants and for the methodology used. The findings chapters of this thesis (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) are structured in order to highlight the different ways in which government policy has been mediated in the three colleges studied. The three findings chapters focus on distinctive aspects of the college culture: the presentation of the college by the senior management; the teaching staff in the colleges; and the views and experiences of the students. These aspects all have an iterative relationship with the culture of the college. The history and heritage of the college impacts on them, and they impact on the future of the college. Finally, Chapter 8 will summarise the main findings of this research before linking the findings to the wider literature and discussing the implications for these findings.

1.6 Conclusion

Scotland's colleges developed in an ad hoc manner to meet the needs of the local area/labour market. Under the control of local authorities, colleges retained their local identity and avoided duplication and competition. However, following incorporation, colleges tended to lose some of their distinctiveness in the race to recruit increasing numbers of students. The duplication of provision following incorporation lead to considerable inefficiency, and the Griggs Report has recommended further college mergers to strip out surplus provision. Pressures to compete in the marketplace resulted in colleges focusing more on their image than their institutional culture and identity. This commodification of learning is the result of strong pressures from the SFC to meet economic targets and fewer demands to think about community development. The question remains whether over-marketing results in a loss of individual identity. It also raises questions about whether too much of a focus on commercial goals may lead to a dilution of social development goals. Where community development does exist, it is often addressed through the labour market. This thesis will examine how colleges in Scotland balance economic and social goals whilst adhering to Scottish Government policy.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This thesis considers how the Scottish Government's lifelong learning policy is understood and enacted in three different colleges. In order to understand the development of Scottish policy, it is important to understand the way in which this has been shaped by on-going debates in the academic literature and in policy texts. Although the underlying concepts of what was previously termed 'lifelong education' have been around for many years, in research terms it is a relatively new concept and remains relatively under-researched when compared with schools or universities (Field, 2003). That research which does exist has tended to focus on patterns of participation and issues concerning the curriculum. However, there is a growing body of work which 'attaches significance to the social context of learning and to interrelationships between learner, activity and context' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000, p 584).

It is important to understand how lifelong learning is defined within this research and how the concept of lifelong learning can be used to effectively analyse the data collected. It has been argued that lifelong learning serves four main functions: the creation of human capital; the creation of social capital; personal development and growth; and as a form of social control (Riddell et al., 2001). The first half of this chapter is structured around three of these main functions and discusses them in turn, examining the main writers who have developed these ideas and the implications for lifelong learning within Scotland's colleges. The personal development aspects of lifelong learning are inextricably linked to the development of social capital, and have therefore not been considered separately. The focus of this thesis is not the

individual, but rather looking at the tensions between the economic and social objectives in Scottish Government policy and how these tensions are played out in colleges.

2.2 Lifelong learning as a generator of human capital

2.2.1 The origin of human capital theory

Human capital theory is a concept which has emerged from an economic agenda. Its roots can be traced back to the work of the economist Adam Smith who stated that the acquired abilities of a nation should be included as part of that country's capital (Smith, 1776). Human capital is defined as the skills and knowledge acquired by individuals in order to enhance their economic position. The individual or the state can invest in human capital through schooling, on-the-job training or medical care. The late 1950s and early 1960s saw a growing interest among economists concerning the importance of education to economic development. Adam Smith's (1776) work was an influence on the work of Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker. Schultz and Becker were concerned that the growth in physical capital and labour did not account for the entirety of the increases in production over time. The growth of income in most countries was found to be much larger than the increases of land and physical capital. Schultz argues that investment in human capital was 'probably the major explanation for this' (Schultz, 1971, p 24). Schultz also noted that people in the United States were investing heavily in themselves through education, enhancing their 'capabilities as producers and as consumers by investing in themselves and that schooling is the largest investment in human capital' (Schultz, 1963, p x). Schultz defined human capital as: 'the acquired skills and knowledge of the human agent that augment his economic productivity' (Schultz, 1963, p x). Becker's work applied the principles of economics to the study of education, the family,

health and discrimination within the structure of rational choice theory. With rational choice theory, comes the assumption that each person in society is serving their own interests in a rational manner (Becker, 1964, p 1). Education is approached as an investment which concerns costs and returns. Becker used economics to suggest that people participate in education and training because of the personal economic benefits they can hope to receive.

2.2.2 Using the language of economics

By using the term 'capital', the work of Becker and Schultz was instantly situated within the language of economics. Within this mode of thinking, any investment of time and/or money must yield a proportionate economic return in order to appear viable. Knowledge becomes a highly marketable asset and one which can be used as a source of capital to promote economic growth by the individual or, on a larger scale, by the government or private sector (Field, 2006, p 9). Thus, if the government invests money, and the individual invests time in college education, the knowledge and skills acquired must be transferable to the labour market. In this version of a learning society, investment in college participation must be proportionate to future economic prosperity. Therefore, investment must be targeted at those groups who are most likely to yield the most significant economic returns (Riddell, et al., 2001, p 17). Human capital stresses the importance of looking at human beings as a capital investment (Ecclestone, 2000, p 78). It is this assumption that is the subject of much debate over human capital's moral and philosophical underpinnings. Arguments arose over whether it is 'permissible to extend the concept of capital to man' (Schultz, 1963, p x). Concerns over the morality of viewing human beings as capital goods invoked images of slavery and bondage, reducing free men to 'something akin to property' (Schultz, 1971, p 26). Although debate still remains over the moral ambiguities surrounding human capital, it has become

much more widely accepted within government policy. In the 1990s both former presidents Bush and Clinton used the term 'investing in human capital' to describe the need to improve the labour force in America (Becker, 1993, p xix). The Scottish Government has also recently used the phrase human capital in the Economic Strategy, describing it as the country's greatest asset (Scottish Government, 2007b).

2.2.3 Criticisms of human capital theory

Moving to a more critical view of human capital, it is important to note that the writers above viewed the accumulation of human capital as a rational pursuit, however, viewing education solely in terms of an economic investment has come under criticism as it means that any form of learning that does not yield an economic return cannot be seen as of intrinsic value This does not take into account the value of learning for enjoyment and personal growth. As Schuller and Field acknowledge, 'people do, and should, value learning as something which they enjoy' (Schuller and Field, 1998, p 227). Economists treat this form of intrinsically motivated learning as simply a form of leisure which has little relevance to education as an agent of human capital. The danger of this 'language of investment', is that the more it becomes accepted and dominates thinking about learning activities, the greater tendency there is to dismiss those educational pursuits which cannot justify themselves with the promise of a visible, and indeed, speedy return on an economic investment.

Human capital theory has also been criticised as it takes for granted that 'an individual's demand of education will automatically be transformed into real human capital' (Vandenberghe, 1999, p 129). However, there are arguments over the direct correlation between a highly educated society and a burgeoning economy. If individuals equip

themselves with the same knowledge and skills, this will result in an over-saturation in that particular market, leaving potential skills gaps in other areas. It is argued that a society only needs a certain amount of highly skilled individuals for specific markets in order to flourish. If pressure is placed on all individuals to increase their human capital to compete in these markets then the education system will be turning out large numbers of "unemployable educated young people, at least unemployable for the domains for which they have trained" (Sennet, 2006, p 86). A counter-argument here is that highly educated individuals create new 'knowledge economy' jobs for themselves as in the creation of new technologies in Silicon Valley, California in the 1980s. Human capital theory also takes for granted the connection between higher investment in education and stronger GDP growth. However, there are those who argue against this connection and point to countries such as India, China and Brazil as examples of low investment in education at government or individual level but strong economic growth (Fishlow, 2011, Schrooten, 2011)

2.2.4 A definition of human capital

For the purposes of this research, human capital is defined as the competencies, skills and knowledge acquired by an individual through education, training and experience, which increases that individual's value in the labour market. The work of Becker and Schultz argues that engaging in education with the aim of increasing future economic prosperity is a rational pursuit. Individuals invest in themselves through education in order to make more money in the long run. As this is seen as a rational pursuit it is more likely that this refers to post-16 provision where the individual has made a conscious choice to either remain in or return to formal education. The Scottish Government views engaging in lifelong learning as the means

to generate human capital and views the learning which takes place at Scotland's colleges in economic terms.

However, many theorists question the value of human capital theory when it is detached from social context. This conjures up images of the 'Walkman' version of a learning society (Schuller, 1997), where the activity of learning is a solitary pursuit, divorced from social contact. Human capital would rise to a point, but at the expense of communication and personal relationships which are crucial "to many forms of effective learning" (Schuller and Field, 1998, p 231). By focusing on the achievements of the individual, human capital theories tend to ignore "the wider social context within which much learning takes place" (Schuller and Field, 1998, p 228). An individual's social connections can influence their learning and thus, influence their accumulation of human capital. Lifelong learning becomes the driver of human capital. Field (2006) has argued that by focusing on human capital, the process of lifelong learning prioritises the economic aspects of individuals' lives leaving out the positive effects engaging in learning can have on personal development and on wider society. He goes on to describe the human capital approach as 'reductionist', ignoring wider political and cultural factors which inspire individuals to engage in lifelong learning.

2.3 Lifelong learning as a generator of social capital

2.3.1 An alternative to human capital?

Although some have hailed social capital as an alternative to the economic system of self interest and human capital, the relationship between social and human capital is far more complex and the two are not necessarily at odds with one another. Rather, they exist in a

relationship of tension (Field et al., 2000, p 250). Social capital, unlike human capital, focuses on the relationships and networks that exist between individuals or groups of individuals. These relationships allow the persons involved to effectively pursue common goals (Schuller, 2004). Elements of social capital such as trust and reciprocity are essential to the operation of a civil society and to the generation and maintenance of human capital (Riddell et al., 2001, p 19). In this case, relationships are a resource. The metaphor 'social capital' implies that connections can be profitable, if you make an investment, you can expect a return. It is viewed as "socially-motivated" and is often seen as liberating after the constrictions of an economic-based system of human capital (Ecclestone, 2000, p 79). As opposed to human capital's focus on the individual, social capital is based on a view that "individualism undermines collective commitments" (Ecclestone, 2000, p 82).

2.3.2 The social context of learning

Social capital has been conceptualised differently by various theorists over the years and this has led to some describing it as a heuristic rather than analytical concept (Portes, 1998). James Coleman was influenced by Gary Becker's work on human capital. However, he questioned the value of human capital theory when it was detached from social context. Social capital utilises the economists' principle of rational action, wherein the actor has control over their resources and interests, using it in the analysis of social systems without discarding the social context and organisations surrounding the actor (Coleman, 1988, p 97). Coleman argued that social capital could be used as a conceptual tool to show how the principle of rational or purposeful action, combined with particular social contexts, could be used to help explain the actions of individuals in those social contexts. It could also be used to help understand the development of social organisations in particular social settings

(Coleman, 1988, p 96). Social capital consists of some aspect of a social structure which facilitates certain actions of individuals who are located within the structure. As with other forms of capital such as financial, physical and human, social capital is "productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence" (Coleman, 1990, p 302). Social capital can help explain variations of human capital in a given society. Coleman's study *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (1966) found that a pupil's achievement in education was 'strongly related to the educational backgrounds and aspirations of the other students' (Coleman, 1966, p 22). He also found that family structure and the presence or absence of parents in the home could affect the educational motivation of pupils, arguing that "children from broken homes could be expected to achieve less well than children from homes that are intact" (Coleman, 1966, p 205). The major results from the study found that elements of the child's social environment affected their achievements to varying degrees. Their friends and family affected them most, their teachers affected their achievement levels next most and the school environment affected their achievement levels the least. These findings challenged the effectiveness of policies which placed the greatest importance on increasing non-personal resources in schools. Coleman's work has been criticised for its conservatism with regard to the ideal nuclear family which he suggests is best suited to encouraging child development. However, he did highlight the links between the generation of human and social capital.

2.3.3 Education, trust and co-operation

Robert Putnam is another American sociologist associated with the development of the concept of social capital. Putnam defined social capital as "features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating

co-ordinated actions" (Putnam, 1993, p 167). Putnam found that trust was an essential component of social capital. Trust and cooperation within a society increased the levels of social capital which in turn sustained and developed economic dynamism and government performance (Putnam, 1993, p 171). Putnam's work also described the dramatic decline of community involvement in the United States since its peak in the 1960s. Putnam argued that this had resulted in the long-term depletion of stocks of social capital in America. High levels of community involvement throughout the 1950s and 1960s resulted in high levels of trust among communities. Education, specifically college education, was deemed to be the best predictor of civic engagement which in turn would lead to greater levels of tolerance and civic mobilisation. Putnam's work in *Bowling Alone* argued that social capital could also contribute positively to safe and productive neighbourhoods, economic prosperity, health and well-being and the performance of democratic institutions (Putnam, 2000).

2.3.4 Lifelong learning and civic engagement

A strong association has been identified between lifelong learning and civic engagement (Field, 2005, p 13). The connections made in colleges can serve to function in a similar manner to connections in the workplace as "a locus of social solidarity, a mechanism for mutual assistance and shared expertise" (Putnam, 2000, p 80). Learning environments foster social relationships allowing people to increase their social networks and build up their social skills. In societies where there is little community interaction, participation in lifelong learning can serve as a focal point for shared endeavour, nurturing a collective identity and bringing together groups of people who would not otherwise interact in such close proximity. Increased participation in organised adult learning increases the likelihood of membership of more organisations and civic activity (Warde and Tampubolon, 2002). By engaging in

lifelong learning the individual is believed to have a greater feeling of control over their own life and their personal and social confidence which increases the possibility of participating in civic life. However, one of the major problems with this view is that college courses only tend to last for a few years or even less, leaving only a short time for individuals to connect with the college and their classmates. Learners may also enter college with the mind-set that they are only going to be there for a short period of time and have no desire to create new social connections.

2.3.5 Consequences of unequal access to social capital

Both Coleman and Putnam shared the view that the accumulation of social capital is a positive pursuit and mourned its depletion in modern society. However, social networks with high levels of social capital are not always beneficial to all. Pierre Bourdieu argued that norms of trust and reciprocity were mainly for the benefit of those inside the networks and these could be exploited by power elites to achieve their own ends which could be averse to the public good (Bourdieu, 1984; 1986). Bourdieu's studies in the field of social reproduction followed on from Emile Durkheim's work on power inequalities within hierarchical social structures (Durkheim, 1896). Bourdieu had a neo-Marxist view of education and social inequality and focused on the way powerful groups reproduced their positions in society, so all social capital is not 'socially good' (Jarvis, 2007). He argued that unequal access to social capital allowed for the social reproduction of dominant class values. Bourdieu used empirical research to show how a person's social class influenced their tastes and aspirations (Bourdieu. 1984). He argued that the wealthy and powerful used the process of education to maintain their grip on French society and believed that "economic capital is at the root of all other types of capital" (Bourdieu, 1986, p 114). He continued this theme in *Homo*

Academicus (1988) where he argued that "the most autonomous positions are never entirely free of the external necessities of social reproduction" (Bourdieu, 1988, p 53). According to Bourdieu, the capital associated with a student's social or geographical origins help to turn "inherited advantages into earned advantages through an outstandingly successful school career" (Bourdieu, 1988, p 53). Bourdieu felt that the academic system served as a system of social reproduction whereby the hierarchies in society are exhibited in university careers. The distribution of educational opportunity in a society can reflect the distribution of power in a society, with the more privileged members granted more opportunity. Uneven access to lifelong learning opportunities "erodes self-confidence, holds people back, devalues their achievements and depresses the fuller development of society as a whole" (Williamson, 1998, p 79). In this case, equal access to educational opportunities is essential for a society to achieve social cohesion and social equality.

2.3.6 The influence of environment on educational activity

It has been argued that high levels of social capital within certain communities may limit participation in formal post-16 education. If an individual's community places high value on education (skills, knowledge and qualifications), then it is more likely that the individual will strive to adhere to these norms and values (Field, 2005, p 30). However, it is conceivable that some communities may have a negative view of adult learning. If the community is based on values of low-attainment, this can have a negative effect on the individual's motivation to participate in formal education. Social capital theory can provide one way of understanding high levels of academic attainment for initial education and comparatively low levels of participation and achievement in adult education (Field et al., 2000, p 252). However, it is

clear that demand for post-compulsory education in Scotland is high with up to 440,000 annual enrolments in the college sector alone (www.scotland.gov.uk, 2012).

Communities with high levels of social capital may provide many opportunities for informal learning, but this can be inherently narrowing (Jarvis, 2007, p 120). Access can be limited to only those resources available in a specific locale or community (Field et al., 2000, p 255). Social capital is usually very local and the close ties created can "constrain as much as they empower" (Field, 2006, p 141). If a community has high levels of social capital then they may "base their cohesion on the active exclusion of those regarded as socially deviant" (Riddell et al., 2001, p 19). Groups with a high level of social capital may be limited in their knowledge, displaying what Polyani (1966) described as 'tacit knowledge'. That is, knowledge that is "embodied through practice and bedded into specific relationships and contexts" (Field, 2005, p 14). Individuals attend college in order to obtain a wider range of skills and qualifications necessary to gain employment.

2.3.7 Bridging and bonding social capital

Whilst attending post-compulsory education, it is important that individuals develop what Putnam refers to as 'bridging ties' that will help them access sources of information from outside their own specific community. During the course of his analysis in *Bowling Alone*, Putnam makes the important distinction between two different dimensions of social capital: bridging (or inclusive) and bonding (or exclusive). Bonding capital is inward-looking and tends to reinforce the identities and values of those within a specific homogenous group. Bridging capital is outward-looking and can include people across social groups. Putnam explains the difference as: 'bonding capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue,

whereas bridging capital provides a sociological WD-40" (Putnam, 2000, p 23). Colleges have a long history of widening access to various groups including the most disadvantaged, providing an opportunity to develop bridging social capital.

2.3.8 A definition of social capital

For the purposes of this research, social capital is defined as the value placed on social interactions, connections and networks which can facilitate individual and community objectives. Unlike human capital, social capital is more difficult to measure as it is more fluid and hazy in its definition and thus, more difficult to tie to lifelong learning. Coleman argued that the social background of students affected their achievement levels and that individuals' expectations of education were closely linked to their social backgrounds. Putnam stated that the college can act as a locus of community solidarity which accommodates the development of human capital. High levels of social capital are presented by Coleman and Putnam as positive; however, Bourdieu's work demonstrates the relationship between high levels of social capital and inequalities within the education system. Within Bourdieu's world view, social capital is a finite commodity, and its monopolisation by advantaged social groups works to the detriment of less advantaged groups. As noted earlier, Faure et al. (1972) emphasised the potential of lifelong learning to contribute to individuals' wellbeing and personal development, thus contributing to social capital reserves. The idea of education as a good in itself, irrespective of the economic advantages it confers, has been a long-term theme of those promoting adult education. It is evident in the ethos and mission of diverse organisations ranging from the Workers' Education Association to the European Association for the Education of Adults. Social capital can be used in different ways. What Putnam refers to as 'bridging' social capital can help develop close ties with individuals from different

social groups whereas ‘bonding’ social capital can reinforce the values of a homogenous group.

2.4 Lifelong learning as a means of social control

Within late modernity, it is evident that lifelong learning may be used not just for the creative purposes of generating human and social capital and facilitating individual growth, but also in order to exert control over individuals who fail to comply with the imperatives of the labour market. Policy makers are constantly grappling with the problem of how to control, rather than be controlled by, the new global economy. Lifelong learning is viewed, particularly in the wake of recent global economic crises, as one of the few policy levers still within the control of the government.

2.4.1 Lifelong learning as a condition attached to benefit receipt

An individual’s willingness to engage in lifelong learning may also affect their rights of access to welfare benefits. In an effort to ensure individuals engage in lifelong learning to up-skill and re-join the labour market, countries such as the UK have tied the receipt of welfare benefits to participation. Within many developed countries, there is a growing emphasis on active labour market policies and on conditionality attached to the receipt of welfare payments (Riddell et al., 2010). This is particularly evident in relation to people who receive benefits and who are expected to undertake training programmes, often run by colleges, in order for their welfare payments to continue. For example, unpaid work experience in a supermarket as a condition of job seekers allowance. This use of perpetual training,

particularly in the absence of employment opportunities, may reflect a dystopian vision of the learning society.

2.4.2 The responsibility of individuals to engage in lifelong learning

Following the economic crisis of the late 1970s, which saw a sharp rise in unemployment and the collapse of the youth labour market, governments across Europe have taken an increased interest in the relationship between lifelong learning and social inclusion/exclusion. Social exclusion represents a division in society between an included majority and an excluded minority (Levitas, 2005). Opening up access to lifelong learning was perceived as a way of addressing inequalities and deprivation in society. Social exclusion is embedded in different discourses which manifest the problems associated with social exclusion to a different degree. These three discourses are: a redistributionist discourse (RED) where the prime concern is poverty and social exclusion is intertwined with policy; a moral underclass discourse (MUD) which deploys cultural rather than material explanations of poverty by focusing on the moral and behavioural delinquency of those who are excluded; and a social integrationist discourse (SID) which focuses on paid work and labour market attachment as the means for social inclusion (Levitas, 2005).

In the mid-1990s, when European lifelong learning policy was focused on economic competitiveness, the recently-elected New Labour government's conception of inclusion moved away from RED to draw on a combination of SID and MUD. In the first months of the Blair Government, New Labour arrived at a distinctive performative understanding of inclusion placing a strong emphasis on the importance of education and training as the route to social inclusion. Labour blamed the problems of social exclusion, manifested through unemployment and poor pay, on the poor skills levels of the potential workforce (Levitas,

2005). This mirrors the issues surrounding the beginnings of the college sector discussed in Chapter 1, where the technical deficiencies of the workforce were blamed for low economic growth. The Labour budget of the late 1990s, which centred on the idea of 'making work pay' was rooted in social integrationist discourse. In order to raise national skill levels, more resources should be put into education and training. Social exclusion was viewed in terms of the damage it could do to wider society by undermining social cohesion (Levitas, 2005, p 35). This understanding was also carried through to the newly-formed and Labour-led Scottish Parliament in 1999. In this utilitarian view, social exclusion undermines social cohesion and imposes an economic cost. Therefore, learning which does not lead directly to employment may be viewed to not have economic worth. Thus there is a tension within social integrationist discourse. Those outside the paid workforce are defined as socially excluded. The non-employed and those engaging in learning which does not lead directly to employment are marginalised despite these activities having economic and social worth. Not recognising this worth can be potentially damaging to society (Levitas, 2005)

Within current UK government discourse, there is a tendency to blame economically inactive individuals for their own problems, with a failure to participate in lifelong learning being seen as a major cause of worthlessness, rather than a lack of jobs. As noted by Coffield, at times of economic crisis the responsibility for remaining employable is transferred onto the individuals who may not possess "the power to remove structural barriers which prevent them learning" (Coffield, 1999, p 482). The expectation that it is the responsibility of individuals to engage in lifelong learning in order to remain employable was a theme from the New Labour government which was carried through to the current Westminster coalition government (referred to as *Your skills, your future*, www.direct.gov.uk, 2012). The coalition

government views skills development as the key to safeguarding the UK's long-term growth, generating human capital by turning knowledge to commercial use in order to:

> *Create a dynamic and efficient skills system with informed, empowered learners and employers served by responsive colleges and other providers in their areas (www.number10.gov.uk, 2012).*

These sentiments are also reflected in the Scottish Government's Skills Strategy (Scottish Government, 2007). The devolved Scottish Government places a large responsibility on the individual to engage in lifelong learning but does not demonise those who are economically inactive as these matters remain the responsibility of the UK government. However, lifelong learning is perceived as a crucial aspect of participation in social and economic life and the importance of this role has grown in the recent economic downturn. Social theorists such as Giddens (1991) and Field (2006) have both stressed the central role knowledge plays in our society. Employers expect flexibility from their workforce and individuals are expected to engage in a constant search for new knowledge. Rose argues that individuals are expected to "engage in a ceaseless work of training and re-training, skilling and re-skilling" in what is described as "a continuous capitalization of the self" (Rose, 1999, p 161). Learning is no longer something that is confined in our early years as preparation for life; it is something that is used *throughout* our lives in order to keep up with the increasing changes we will encounter. With fewer people finding themselves in 'jobs for life', the demand for constant up-skilling and re-skilling is increasing. Individuals are required to use lifelong learning not only to seek new careers but to progress in their current career, and, as noted by Sennet (2006), this pressure may generate fear and insecurity amongst individuals. The presumption shared by current UK and Scottish Government discourses is that inclusion in the labour

market will lead to greater social inclusion (Holford and Špolar, 2012). They pay little attention to the ways in which paid employment may impede inclusion by dividing employment between very highly-paid jobs for some and low-paid jobs for others. In this situation, the problems of social division and exclusion are intensified (Bourdieu, 1986). The process of policy making in lifelong learning is subject to a great deal of influence from external factors and organisations. Educational systems are expected to contribute to a country's economic competitiveness (Riddell and Weedon, 2012, p 7).

To summarise, within the academic literature on lifelong learning it is possible to identify distinctive strands emphasising its function as a generator of human capital and social capital, and the links between these two concepts. The part played by lifelong learning as a form of governance in late modernity is also a theme in the literature, particularly in the work of Coffield (1998). In the following section, I consider how these ideas are reflected in policy documents and examine how lifelong learning policy has developed in Scotland over the last two decades.

2.5 Scottish lifelong learning policy

2.5.1 Developing a lifelong learning strategy

In 2003 the Labour-led Scottish Executive published their Lifelong Learning Strategy: *Life Through Learning; Learning Through Life*. This document outlined the Executive's five-year strategy for lifelong learning in Scotland and sought to highlight the benefits engaging in lifelong learning bring to the individual as well as to wider Scottish society by focusing equally on the economic and wider non-economic benefits of engaging in lifelong learning

(Scottish Executive, 2003). The Lifelong Learning Strategy was informed by two previous publications. Firstly, the economic elements of the Lifelong Learning Strategy built on the work of *Opportunity Scotland*, the former Scottish Office's vision for lifelong learning, which set out to encourage skills development and achievement in the adult population (Scottish Office, 1998). This report was one of the first Scottish policy documents to focus specifically on a strategy for lifelong learning and the benefits increased participation can have on improving national skills levels and the country's position in the global economy. *Opportunity Scotland* mentioned that since lifelong learning became part of the national consciousness, there is "no such thing as a typical student", encouraging adults who may have thought it was beyond them to return to learning (Scottish Office, 1998, p 5). This document presented lifelong learning as a means of increasing people's skills levels and qualifications, stressing the economic importance of lifelong learning and offering a ten-point action plan to widen access to learning opportunities. Lifelong learning was presented here as an economic lever, encouraging skills development and employability.

2.5.2 The wider social benefits of lifelong learning in Scottish policy

Whilst much of the thinking regarding the economic value of lifelong learning present within the Lifelong Learning Strategy can be traced back to *Opportunity Scotland*, the elements of social justice and wider social benefits of participation were developed in the wake of the *Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee Inquiry into Lifelong Learning* (1999-2003). This committee convened to consider and report on matters relating to the Scottish economy, industry, tourism, training and further and higher education and identified "six areas of change – economic, demographic, social justice, citizenship, skill shortages and technological – which affect the provision of learning in the future" (Scottish Executive, 2003, p 5). The

Committee's report was cited as a key influence on the Lifelong Learning Strategy and highlighted the main social issues which were developed further within the strategy including a move to entitlement, the integration of different elements of Lifelong Learning, and a focus on targeting disadvantage (Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, 2003). The Committee's final report was based around a central principle that all adults should have an entitlement to lifelong learning and it was from this central concept that much of the thinking regarding social justice in the Lifelong Learning Strategy was developed.

2.5.3 Bridging the opportunity, skills and productivity gaps

The Lifelong Learning Strategy began by defining lifelong learning as "post compulsory education, training and learning…encompassing the whole range of learning: formal and informal learning, workplace learning, and the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours that people acquire in day-to-day experiences" (Scottish Executive, 2003, p 8). Lifelong learning policy in Scotland is described as being "about personal fulfilment and enterprise; employability and adaptability; active citizenship and social inclusion" (Scottish Executive, 2003, p 8). This definition was consistent with academic conceptualisations of the learning society which identified three functions of lifelong learning: learning for work; learning for citizenship; and learning for democracy (Tett, 2006, p 20). The strategy also identified three 'gaps' which needed to be addressed: the opportunity gap (where all people can achieve their full potential); the skills gap (where people are equipped with the necessary skills to remain employable); and the productivity gap (between Scotland and the leading economies of the world) (Scottish Executive, 2003). The Labour administration aimed to 'bridge' these gaps as they were believed to be essential in inspiring individuals to help themselves and to make social justice a reality. There was equal emphasis placed on the social and economic benefits

of engaging in lifelong learning present in this document. The two main incentives presented as reasons for investing in lifelong learning focused on their target of investment in knowledge and skills, which bring direct economic returns to individuals and society, and the development of society through civic participation, improved health and wellbeing, reduced crime and greater social cohesion. Unlike *Opportunity Scotland*, the Lifelong Learning Strategy did not present lifelong learning as simply support for the demands of the economy as it explicitly stressed the importance of developing a "social and civic" Scotland (Fairley, 2003, p 124).

2.5.4 Providing equal access to lifelong learning

The Labour administration was keen to emphasise that lifelong learning is not only of benefit to the economy but also a means of bringing benefits to wider Scottish society through increased levels of civic participation and higher levels of employment:

> *That's because lifelong learning brings benefits (to) the social fabric of our society as well as the economy. In other words, lifelong learning has an important and distinctive contribution to make to people's wellbeing, to a more inclusive society and to a vibrant and sustainable economy (Scottish Executive, 2003, p 5).*

The Lifelong Learning Strategy's five-year plan aimed to realise a vision of a Scotland where people have confidence in their ability to learn, demand a high quality learning experience and where their skills are recognised and utilised to the best effect by their employers. It also suggested that people should be informed and guided in order to help them make an educated choice, stating that all individuals in Scotland, irrespective of their background, should have

the opportunity to learn (Scottish Executive, 2003). It was noted that uneven access to lifelong learning opportunities entrenched inequalities and discrimination, as described by Bourdieu (1988). The Scottish Executive was very concerned with issues surrounding personal development and social justice in Scotland highlighting the importance of breaking the cycle of deprivation in Scotland by raising personal and community ambitions, thus lifting children out of poverty. This presented lifelong learning as a solution to all of society's ills, echoing Frank Coffield's argument that the lifelong learning agenda provides politicians with an easy answer and offers an all-encompassing solution to complex problems (Coffield, 1999).

2.5.5 Reasons for participating in lifelong learning

The Lifelong Learning Strategy focused on post-compulsory education and identified at least four key factors which determine people's participation in learning. These were: Individual attitudes towards learning; social environment; economic and financial context; and institutional factors. This reflected Coleman's (1966, 1980) view that an individual's social environment affects their disposition towards lifelong learning. The Lifelong Learning Strategy acknowledged that attending college is not a normative, universal desire for all people above school-age, and it must be approached as an individual choice arising from specific circumstances (Scottish Executive, 2003). Lifelong learning or 'lifelong education' has always placed a great deal of importance on the individual and The Lifelong Learning Strategy continued to place the responsibility for learning in the hands of the learner. It identified the future threat of a growing post-retirement population that would require older workers to stay in the labour market for longer and be able to respond quickly to changes in the skills demanded by employers (Scottish Executive, 2003). Learning in this sense has

shifted from a ‘right’ to a ‘duty’. According to the Lifelong Learning Strategy, it is an individual’s responsibility to engage in lifelong learning and to maintain their own employability. The Lifelong Learning Strategy was also very focused on qualifications and encouraging individuals to engage in formal education, possibly at the expense of informal learning in community learning centres. However, whilst the Lifelong Learning Strategy stressed individual responsibility, it also recognised that people must be given the opportunity to develop their potential (Scottish Executive, 2003). This message was carried over into policy documents produced by the SNP-led Scottish Government.

2.5.6 Skills for Scotland

When the SNP administration was elected in Scotland in 2007, they were quick to make lifelong learning a top priority and it was clear that much of the thinking behind the previous administration’s lifelong learning strategy was carried over into the new SNP administration, as was much of the language:

> *We can only build a Scotland that is wealthier and fairer, one that is healthier, safer, stronger and greener, if people are equipped with the skills, expertise and knowledge for success (Scottish Government, 2007a, p 2).*

The Scottish Government produced *Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Learning Skills Strategy* in September 2007, within the first 100 days of the new government (which may account for much of the similar language), and the strategy highlighted the importance of developing skills for employability to lifelong learning. It also highlighted the importance of working in partnership with other educational institutions (something which colleges and universities have been urged to increase (Scottish Government, 2010b). This Strategy was updated in October 2010. This update, entitled *Accelerating the Recovery and Increasing Sustainable*

Economic Growth, aimed to refresh the skills strategy in the wake of the recession and renew the focus on skills development as the means to increase employability (Scottish Government, 2010c).

2.5.7 Learning for employment

The skills strategy was influenced by the UK government commissioned review of skills: *Prosperity for all in the Global Economy – World Class Skills*, also known as the Leitch Report (HM Treasury, 2006). This report focused on the need for a more highly skilled and productive workforce in the UK as a whole, with education and lifelong learning geared directly to the needs of the employers. In addition, the Lisbon Agenda highlighted the problems of low productivity and stagnation of economic growth as key barriers to competing in the knowledge economy (European Union, 2005). In 2007, Scotland had a higher number of people with a higher education qualification than basic school leaver qualifications, the only nation in the UK to achieve this level. However, the economic growth rate of Scotland did not match the rest of the UK. This was a pressing concern for the Scottish Government which was keen to see Scotland adhere to the Lisbon Agenda and compete in the global knowledge economy (Scottish Government, 2007a). Skills development was seen as vital for providing individuals who had moved away from work with the skills they need to re-enter the workplace. It was also vital that the skills and qualifications gained by participating in lifelong learning were geared towards the needs of employers and designed to increase employability. Periods where people are not in work or education have a negative impact on both the life of the individual and the economy.

Skills for Scotland begins by equating the years an individual spends in education with the generation of human capital which has the "potential to produce a long-term return" (Scottish

Government, 2007a, p 6). As mentioned above, Scotland's productivity rate is below the UK average and the Skills Strategy argued that employers expect potential employees to possess a certain skills set, however, it goes on to state that many adults in Scotland are bereft of these skills which include: literacy and numeracy; core skills such as communication and problem solving; personal and learning skills; and vocational skills specific to an occupation or sector. Equipping learners with these skills is seen as a key employability focus for lifelong learning and for the Community Learning and Development sector (CLD). Equipping the nation's workforce with education and skills is linked to improved productivity and sustainable economic growth (Scottish Government, 2007a). Human capital theory takes for granted that higher levels of education transfers to improved productivity and higher GDP and, as previously discussed, this assumption has been subject to much criticism

2.5.8 The growing focus on the relationship between lifelong learning and economic growth

Although it shared many similarities with the *Lifelong Learning Strategy* (Scottish Executive, 2005), it is interesting that this previous publication was not mentioned anywhere within *Skills for Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2007a). However, the main difference between these two publications was that *Skills for Scotland*, rather than focusing equally on elements of social capital generation and social inclusion in the manner of the *Lifelong Learning Strategy*, placed an increased emphasis on lifelong learning as a means of generating human capital and skills development. *Skills for Scotland* was written in close quarters with the *Government Economic Strategy* (Scottish Government 2007b), which outlined the Scottish Government's strategic objectives with the aim of creating sustainable economic growth in Scotland. In his introduction, the First Minister explicitly stated that the main way to achieve economic growth was to invest in "the human capital offered by our greatest asset, Scotland's

people" (Scottish Government, 2007b). The Government believed that the years an individual spends in education can help generate a form of capital which can help to produce a long-term return (Scottish Government, 2007b). This is not to say that the Scottish Government abandoned ideas of social inclusion and community development completely. *Skills for Scotland* stated that one of the Government's main aims was to promote equality of opportunity to disadvantaged groups and improve the number of people economically active in those groups. However, there was a definite shift in discourse and communicated priorities (Scottish Government, 2007a). In *Achieving Our Potential*, the Scottish Government outlined its framework to tackle poverty and income equality in Scotland by addressing the root causes of the problem (Scottish Government, 2008a). These social problems were viewed as having economic solutions in line with the Government Economic Strategy (Scottish Government 2007b). Skills development was seen as the means to reduce poverty in Scottish society and participation in lifelong learning was encouraged as the means for people to "fulfil their potential; increase economic growth and participation in the labour market; and create greater social equity across Scotland" (Scottish Government, 2008a, p 3).

2.5.9 Skills for the 21st century

The Scottish Government underlined the message that "earnings rise with qualification level" (Scottish Government, 2007a, p 9). It argued that people need to be made aware of the clear benefits of learning and how best to use what they learn to help improve their career and financial prospects. The results of the 2008 Scottish Employers Skills Survey, *Skills in Scotland 2008*, were published in March 2009. The report suggested that core skills such as communication and teamwork have become much more important as many services have become more customer/client facing. It also suggested that the labour market in the 21st

century requires potential employees to possess increased skills, again highlighting the increased responsibility which individuals are expected to take for maintaining their own employability.

Scotland's population is likely to continue to rise in the immediate future as lower mortality rates are coupled with increased net in-migration (Scottish Executive, 2006a). Scotland's population is now expected to rise to 5.54 million by 2033 with the number of people aged 60 and over increasing by 50 per cent (www.gro-scotland.gov.uk, 2010). Employers will require a sufficient supply of workers that are able to respond quickly to changes in demand. A growing post-retirement population also means that older workers will need to be equipped with skills that will enable them to stay in the labour market longer (Scottish Executive, 2003). Employers will need a workforce of all ages equipped with skills for the 21st century and along with the increased levels of responsibility placed on the individual, a large share of this responsibility for providing this workforce is laid at the door of the college sector. Periods of economic recession usually result in increased levels of unemployment and during these periods it is more crucial than ever for the college sector to be able to equip learners with the skills necessary to gain employment.

2.6 EU policy on lifelong learning

2.6.1 National and international influences on lifelong learning policy

The desire to engage in lifelong learning is driven by individual needs but it is also shaped by external organisations which promote engagement and the potential benefits the individual can be expected to receive. Different views of lifelong learning are supported by different

organisations which range from the European Union, the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Government, through to trade unions and employers. It is widely accepted that global economic developments underpin much educational policy (DfEE, 1999, cited in Avis, Bathmaker and Parsons, 2002, p 186). Educational systems are very important to economic competitiveness and lifelong learning policy is closely related to globalisation. Lifelong learning came to prominence in European policy at more or less the same time as the rise of the knowledge economy (CEC, 2000; Jones, 2005). Lifelong learning can be used as a form of globalised policy in the knowledge economy. Inter-governmental organisations such as the EU, OECD, UNESCO and the World Bank play an important role in shaping discourses of globalisation which have implications for education. This discourse is based around the imperatives of the global economy. The development of lifelong learning policy in Scotland has been influenced, at least to some extent, by wider developments in Europe (Weedon and Riddell, 2012). However, developments in Scotland, such as the development on the SCQF, have also fed into wider international developments so an iterative relationship exists between Scottish lifelong learning policy and European policy.

2.6.2 The rise of lifelong learning in Europe

The European Union began in the 1950s as the European Common Market, with economic competitiveness at its heart. Education played a relatively minor role until the early 1970s. Learning was not perceived as a lifelong activity at this stage and vocational education and training was viewed within the economic focus of the single market and closely connected to the labour market. The concept of 'lifelong education' rose to prominence in the late 1960s and early 1970s through various publications from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and United Nations' Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The report entitled *Learning to Be* (later referred to as the Faure Report) is the most well known of this period (Faure et al., 1972). This report featured a strong humanistic focus on lifelong education as the means to exercise personal freedom. It has since been argued that that the humanistic approach of the Faure report was at odds with the vocational language surrounding lifelong learning (Boshier, 1998). In the 1990s, the term 'lifelong learning' came to replace 'lifelong education' and rather than focusing on the cultural and social objectives of adult education, 'lifelong learning' placed an increased focus on the economic objectives of learning. This became an important term in European policy in the mid to late 1990s and reflected the need to develop skills to reflect labour market demands. A key document of this time was the *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*, published in 2000 (CEC, 2000), which focused strongly on employability and the development of human capital.

2.6.3 The Lisbon strategy

Throughout the 1990s, lifelong learning developed into a key feature in educational, welfare and labour market policies (Riddell et al, 2012). Lifelong learning policy of this period tended to focus on utilitarian economic objectives rather than wider social goals. The Lisbon Strategy was launched in 2000 and aimed to create 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world' (CEC, 2000). The Lisbon goals were about competing with the burgeoning economies of countries like China, India and Brazil. Although social cohesion was an initial aim of the Lisbon Strategy, the focus of this period was of lifelong learning as a generator of human capital. However, by 2003 the EU acknowledged that they were falling short of the goals outlined in the Lisbon Strategy. Regular measurement and progress reporting which focussed on economically-related

outcomes related to vocational learning found the need to improve the quality and comparability of existing indicators (Council of the EU, 2004).

2.6.4 Creating sustainable growth

In the final years of the Lisbon Strategy, the economy in Europe was hit by a succession of economic and political crises, threatening the widening of access to lifelong learning opportunities and leading to a tension between the use of lifelong learning as a means of promoting economic growth through the development of human capital, and as a means of promoting social inclusion through the development of social capital (Riddell et al, 2012). Europe's commitment to social inclusion resurfaces in *Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, which focuses on strategies for developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation and sustainable and inclusive growth (CEC, 2010). Social cohesion is featured strongly. Member states are invited to provide "equitable education and training systems that are aimed at providing opportunities, access, treatment and outcomes that are independent of socio-economic background" (CEC, 2010). National and European socio-economic forces help to shape lifelong learning systems and vice-versa. The central question remains: is lifelong learning in European policy merely serving the interests of global capitalism or is it able to contribute to a more humane version of capitalism which regards personal growth and social cohesion as highly as economic outputs? (Riddell et al, 2012).

2.7 Conclusion

The themes identified in the academic literature (lifelong learning as a generator of human and social capital and as a means of social control) are also evident in the policy documents produced by the EU and the Scottish Government. The tensions between human and social capital are also evident in the development of Scottish Government policy documents concerning lifelong learning.

The most basic assumption made by the Scottish Government is that participation in on-going education will eventually have a positive impact on an individual's financial earnings. By investing in knowledge and skills through a course of education, it is assumed that the individual is making a rational choice to improve their position in the labour market. Other assumed economic benefits include increased employability and greater social mobility. Individuals have come to be viewed as important resources which can collectively enhance the society in which they live. Increasing the skills levels of its population benefits the government as it helps the country maintain its economic competitiveness in the global knowledge-driven economy. The dominant ideology in current Scottish Government policy surrounding lifelong learning focuses on the economic benefits of learning where knowledge is seen as a highly marketable asset and education is viewed as a significant indicator of investment in skills and knowledge.

However, as discussed in this chapter, the tensions which exist between social and economic objectives are evident throughout Scottish Government policy. Widening access to education is presented in terms of increasing skills at the highest level and is often not the result of a rational choice by the individual. Policy from the Scottish Government places the

responsibility of actively participating in the labour market in the hands of those who may not possess the necessary means to overcome the barriers to education which they are required to do in order to ensure their own employability. Lifelong learning is presented as a wonder cure for all of society's ills and is charged with reducing or eradicating economic inequality. However, unequal access to lifelong learning can entrench inequalities in society. If motivations for widening access are concerned with economic priorities such as increasing skills levels and student enrolments and less concerned with social inclusion then it is likely that those individuals most at risk of unemployment will not choose to engage in lifelong learning. This research was undertaken at the beginning of a major economic recession leading to many governments across Europe embarking on a series of public sector cuts. Once governments begin to make cuts, it is likely that inequality will increase (Weedon and Riddell, 2012). The on-going economic crisis and social unrest in Europe makes it even more essential to attend to both the economic and social objectives of lifelong learning.

3. CURRENT TRENDS IN THE SCOTTISH COLLEGE SECTOR

3.1 Introduction

In Chapters 1 and 2 it was argued that lifelong learning is expected to deliver both economic growth and social cohesion. As a key location for much of Scotland's lifelong learning activity, colleges are of vital importance to the Scottish Government and are expected to play a key role in the provision of a qualified workforce as well as contribute to wider issues of equality and social cohesion. The recent economic downturn has placed greater importance on the college sector's role in the labour market and has also placed increased scrutiny on the sustainability of both further and higher education (Scottish Government, 2010b).

Even though policy emphasises both economic and social objectives, the management framework established by the SFC forces the colleges to adhere to rigid targets and performance indicators which are linked to economic rather than social objectives. This chapter will examine how government policies on lifelong learning have impacted on the work of colleges including: the expectation to develop a skilled workforce; to work in partnership with schools and universities; and to work with and widen access to particular groups in society. This is followed by a discussion framed around statistical patterns of participation in Scotland's colleges, providing a contextual and comparative background for the three case studies.

3.2 The impact of policy trends in the Scottish college sector

3.2.1 Scotland's colleges and the influence of managerialism

Colleges in Scotland operate within a managerialist framework where targets reflect easily measurable objectives, particularly linked to student retention and qualifications awarded. As discussed in Chapter 1, the SFC control college funding based on two types of performance indicators: financial indicators and staff and student indicators. According to the SFC these indicators are used to inform stakeholders about the college sector, enabling colleges to benchmark their performance against the rest of the sector and support the wider quality improvement agenda (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010). The SFC maintains that unless these performance indicators are met there is no evidence that colleges are providing value for money. Although these indicators may be seen as evidence that the college is providing skilled workers, it does not necessarily follow that this will lead to job creation. College goals of meeting social objectives and building social cohesion are less readily measured and may be neglected.

When colleges fail to meet these targets, they run the risk of losing funds and the courses may be deemed to be flawed in some way. Hodkinson and Bloomer, criticising the system in England, state that these targets are inaccurate measures of either the quality of college provision or how much has been learned before the students left the college (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2001). Similarly, the current funding arrangements stress the importance of course completion without considering the benefits college learning brings to those who do not complete the course. Many factors may contribute to an individual choosing to drop out of college which are beyond the institution's control or influence. Despite these concerns, the current system links targets and inspection grades to funding and quality assessments. There are three likely side effects of focusing on retention rates and qualification achievements: First, many students who drop out of college drift into what the Scottish Government term as

'More Choices, More Chances' (MCMC) status (Scottish Executive, 2006b), where they are not in education, employment or training, or enter a cycle of short-term employment, continually moving from job to job. Second, although there is a clear policy commitment to widen participation to lifelong learning, this commitment is at risk of being superseded by "an audit culture of educational quality" (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2001, p 138). According to Hodkinson and Bloomer, certain performance indicators such as retention rates can have a detrimental effect on some groups of learners. If courses are already over-subscribed with students who are already likely to achieve, it is unlikely that they will strive to take on the extra work and risk poorer levels of retention and qualification. Courses which are experiencing lower levels of recruitment are more likely to concentrate on widening participation, resulting in inequalities in provision. The third likely side effect is the false assumption between qualification achievement and future economic prosperity. Policy often takes for granted that course completion and qualification achievement leads directly to successful careers. However, there is concern over the assumption of a cause and effect relationship (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2001).

3.2.2 The college sector's role in providing a skilled workforce

The Scottish Government has consistently credited the college sector as having a "key role in the provision of a qualified workforce committed to the achievement of quality in design, development and delivery of products and services" in its policies and strategies (Scottish Executive, 2003). Through its perceived ability to contribute to economic prosperity and tackle poverty and disadvantage, the college sector in Scotland was at the forefront of *Life Through Learning; Learning Through Life* (Scottish Executive, 2003) and the Labour administration's *Closing the Opportunity Gap* (Scottish Executive, 2002) targets. The

dominance of the economic agenda was carried through to the SNP-led Scottish Government. *Skills for Scotland* states that colleges are vital in providing a steady supply of workers skilled to higher levels, providing: vocational education and training related to employment; clear progression routes for learners into employment or further study; and the support for learners to develop their knowledge and skills (Scottish Government, 2007a, p 26). The Scottish Government has stated that employers believe individuals who have successfully completed college or university courses are ready for the world of work (Scottish Government, 2007a). *The Review of Scotland's Colleges* found that 81 per cent of workplaces believed that college leavers were well equipped with regards to soft skills and 80 per cent thought they were well prepared in terms of technical skills (Scottish Executive, 2006a). It also found that workplaces rated college leavers alongside university leavers in terms of preparedness. Research from Futureskills Scotland found that three quarters of Scottish employers consider graduates from college to be well-prepared for the world of work. The study, entitled *The Work-Readiness of Recruits from Colleges and Universities in Scotland*, found that "Scottish employers generally considered such recruits to be well prepared for work and this impacted positively on their business" (Scottish Government, 2008a, p 3).

However, the Scottish Government has argued that workers were not being given time by employers to reach greater levels of competency (Scottish Government, 2007a). Individuals are expected to take responsibility for their own progression as they move through learning. Indeed, *Skills for Scotland* described it as "imperative", and stated that acquiring new skills was "a lengthy and complex process" which requires that the learners be given the appropriate length of time to complete the programme (Scottish Government, 2007a, p 21). Working and learning have previously been perceived as two separate entities. The Scottish Government wants individuals to consider that learning is something that can, and indeed

should, continue throughout their entire life (Scottish Government, 2007a). Despite the increased emphasis on the college sector's role in lifelong learning, the Scottish Government was concerned that employers make relatively little use of colleges for continuing professional development. The *Review of Scotland's Colleges: Unlocking Opportunity*, described the college sector as "pivotal to the delivery of lifelong learning in Scotland" and stressed the economic benefits of engaging in lifelong learning cautiously estimating that every £1 invested in the college sector could be worth at least £3.20 in a year (Scottish Executive, 2006a). For any sector, this was deemed as "an excellent return on investment" (Scottish Executive, 2006a, p 1).

3.3 Developing partnerships

The overall strategic direction for the Scottish college sector, set out by the Employablity, Skills and Lifelong Learning Directorate of the Scottish Government, emphasises the importance of colleges developing partnerships with both schools and universities. The Scottish Government has indicated strong support for collaborative links between colleges and other education and training bodies (Scottish Executive, 2006a).

3.3.1 Providing higher level skills

Since the 1970s, colleges have increasingly been expected to provide degree level qualifications in order to meet future demands for higher level skills. In recent years, Scotland's colleges have built up numerous collaborative partnerships with universities and it is now common for many colleges in Scotland to have links with several Scottish universities, allowing students the opportunity to progress into the second (from an HNC) or

third (from HND) year of a degree course at university. Some colleges have also obtained validation from universities to deliver degree-level work, usually following successful completion of an HND (Johnston, 2003). The formation of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) is an interesting example of the blurred boundaries between further and higher education. This institution emerged from the combined activity of a number of institutions, mainly further education colleges and research centres and is now the only university in the highlands and islands of Scotland. Scottish higher education provision differs from the rest of the UK by having a high proportion of students based in colleges (about 20 per cent of higher education in Scotland is provided in colleges). This group of students have been termed the "hidden higher education students" due to a belief that they are consistently overlooked by policy-makers despite their substantial share of higher education activity (Lowe and Gayle, 2007). Michael Young (2006) has argued that in the UK, the terms further and higher education are somewhat ambiguous and tend to overlap when it comes to terms such as technical, vocational, post-compulsory and post-school education. Some researchers have argued that the wide range of educational provision provided by Scotland's colleges and the overlap with other sectors means that the college sector has a weaker identity in the public consciousness than schools or universities (Johnston, 2003).

3.3.2 Developing partnerships with schools

Colleges have also been urged to increase their links with local schools in an effort to address the problem of the More Choices, More Chances (MCMC) group. In 2004, the Scottish Government identified a particular group of 16-19 year olds who were 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' and were in need of intervention. This group was formerly known as the NEET group and was the target of a separate strategy with the college sector playing a

crucial role. This strategy was updated in 2006 and renamed *More Choices More Chances* with the objective of eradicating the problem of labour market detachment throughout Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2006b). The MCMC group was highlighted as an issue of major importance in Scotland as the "young people who are experiencing (MCMC) today are more likely to become the economically inactive of tomorrow" (Scottish Government, 2006b). The Scottish Executive described the negative impact of a large MCMC group as "twofold: it stands in the way of individuals and society achieving the optimum economic productivity and social inclusion" (Scottish Executive, 2005c). The most prevalent factors which contribute to individuals' inclusion in the MCMC group were identified as: deprivation; financial exclusion; low attainment; weak family and other support networks (such as peers); lack of local employment and the social stigma and attitudes of others relating to education (Scottish Executive, 2005b). Children from poorer households were viewed as less likely to achieve their potential due to factors such as low parental aspirations; a culture of unemployment and poor health and housing. In 2009, around 36,000 young people were classified as part of the MCMC group in Scotland which was the equivalent of about 13.8 per cent of the age group. The size of the MCMC group in Scotland increased significantly between 2008 and 2009 (from 31,000 to 36,000) following a significant reduction in the previous years from a high of 37,000 in 2005 (Scottish Government, 2010a). This was despite increased investment in policies aimed at supporting young people. The problem of wide social inequality in school attainment in Scotland was highlighted by an OECD report (OECD, 2008).

Policies surrounding *More Choices, More Chances* span a range of themes and government departments, encompassing economics, social justice, social inclusion and wider educational policies. Within this mode of thinking, as Coffield (1998) has argued, education is seen as a

resource to tackle all of society's problems. Most of the MCMC polices in Scotland are focused on employability and there is a lack of evidence on the impact these polices have on longer term market outcomes. As a result, policies have failed to focus on meeting the specific needs and issues of the MCMC group. There was a more recent call for 'holistic' policy interventions which offered more targeted support for the MCMC group and address risk factors and barriers (Scottish Executive, 2005b). These interventions included widening pre-16 stage choice through collaborations with Scotland's colleges and offering financial incentives such as Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) (Scottish Executive, 2005b; Scottish Executive, 2006b). The Scottish Government has stated that 'doing nothing' is not a viable option for young people, far better that they be seen as "doing something" (Scottish Executive, 2006b, p 3). EMAs have recently been reviewed and although they have been abolished in England and Wales, the Scottish Government decided they should be retained.

3.3.3 Expanding college provision for learners under the age of 16

Although the MCMC group chiefly consists of young people aged 16-19, the Scottish Government committed itself in May 2003 to enabling 14-16 year olds to develop vocational skills and improve their employment prospects by allowing them to undertake courses in further education colleges as part of the school-based curriculum. This was a deliberate move to address those who may be at risk of becoming part of the MCMC group before they leave school. This was fuelled by anxiety about young people, often from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, who become detached from the labour market at an early stage in their lives. As a result of these government initiatives and the introduction of the Scottish national qualifications, partnerships between schools and colleges have increased greatly in recent years. *Skills for Scotland* built on the work of a previous paper published by the Scottish

Government in February 2004 which reviewed the collaboration between schools and further education colleges in Scotland. The plan was to strengthen the working relationship between the sectors, particularly for 14-16 year olds. The strategy, entitled *Building the Foundations of a Lifelong Learning Society*, was published in November 2004. The purpose of this strategy was:

> *to provide an enriched curriculum which prepares youngsters in appropriate life skills and increases motivation by allowing pupils to have a better understanding of what they are aiming for in the world of work. It should complement the school curriculum with experience of vocational training and provide clear progression routes (Scottish Executive, 2004a, p 9).*

The rationale behind this initiative was to provide those school pupils who were often unsettled at school with increased vocational options promoting a culture of education and increasing pupils' motivation. Increased school-college links are presented as a more suitable route for students who may feel that they have out-grown school, reflecting their future employment options and presenting the opportunity to interact with adult learners which can have a beneficial effect on school pupils by modifying disruptive behaviour. However, it has been pointed out that providing meaningful progression routes for disengaged pupils presents a real challenge to schools and colleges. *Building the Foundations of a Lifelong Learning Society* also stated that "parity of importance with regard to academic courses must be communicated to all pupils" (Scottish Executive, 2004a, p 9). The Education Institute of Scotland stated that "the split between 'academic' and 'vocational' is an outmoded concept" (Scottish Executive, 2004a, p 12). The clear message from this policy rhetoric was that the inclusion of young people is understood in terms of developing vocational skills. *Building the*

Foundations of a Lifelong Learning Society was further updated with the publication of *Lifelong Partners: Scotland's Schools and Colleges Building the Foundations of a Learning Society*, in October 2005. This document outlined the importance of increasing flexibility within the school curriculum to accommodate practical and contextualised vocational programmes.

3.3.4 Ensuring that young people make a contribution to society

In efforts to address the problem of the MCMC group, the Scottish Government has also worked closely with colleges to develop *Skills for Work* programmes for pupils over the age of 14 which they believe "will represent additional opportunities to suit pupils' interests and inclinations, and could contribute to improve outcomes for young people post 16 by providing a pathway from school to education, employment or training" (Scottish Executive, 2006b, p 18). *The Lifelong Skills Strategy* highlighted the importance of influencing attitudes to learning at an early stage which will stay with individuals through their lives (Scottish Government, 2007a, p 15). The Scottish Government argues that negative attitudes towards skills and education are essentially damaging to society and their aim has been to reverse negative behaviour and ways of thinking by encouraging colleges to promote themselves in schools in order to raise pupils' awareness. This is seen as the first step towards long-term employability and an increased contribution to society (Scottish Government, 2007a). In its *Education and Training 2020* Strategy, The European Union has recommended that member states reduce the proportion of early school leavers to 10 per cent. The policy of encouraging such students to move from school to college appears to form part of the Scottish Government's strategy to meet this goal.

The increased links with schools will also be affected by the implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence* which began with The National Debate in Education in Scotland in 2002 as an extensive consultation on the state of education in Scotland. In response to the national debate, the Scottish Executive established the Curriculum Review Group which was charged with establishing clear values and purposes for education from 3 to 18 in Scotland in harmony with the national priorities. The work of the Review Group resulted in the publication of *Curriculum for Excellence* on 1st November 2004. Curriculum for Excellence aims to establish a single curriculum which enables all young people to become 'successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors' (Scottish Executive, 2004c). The new curriculum has been criticised by commentators such as Paterson (2009) on the grounds that it downplays the importance of an academic curriculum accessible to all pupils, undermining the fundamental democratic principles of Scottish education. The extent to which Curriculum for Excellence will impact on the work of Scotland's colleges remains to be seen.

The main policy trends described above reflect the dominance of the economic agenda in Scottish Government lifelong learning policy. The next section will examine how efforts to adhere to this agenda affect statistical trends and patterns for the overall college sector in Scotland including participation over time by age, gender and by specific groups.

3.4 Statistical trends and the sector in profile

As discussed in Chapter 1, the college sector in Scotland is currently under review. Proposals to move to a regional model governed by twelve regional boards mean that the sector may be about to experience its greatest upheaval since incorporation. When this research was

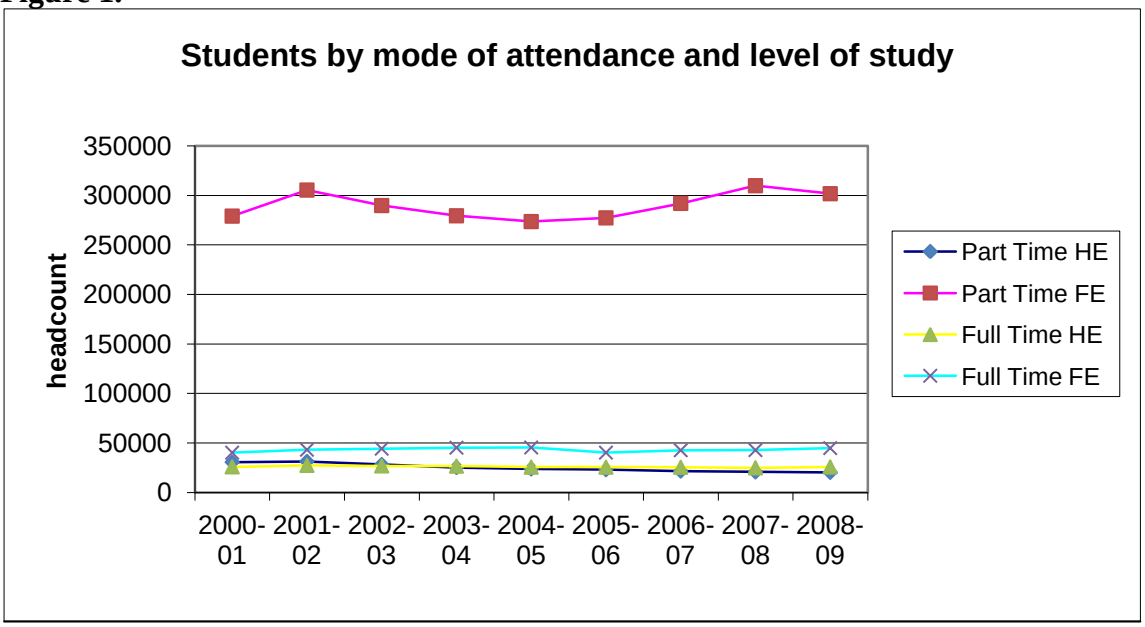
conducted, the college sector in Scotland consisted of 43 colleges of varying size. The largest of these colleges catered for 29, 876 students in the academic year 2008-09 with the smallest catering for only 96 (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010). As the fieldwork for this thesis was carried out in 2009, the statistics used in this section consist of data up to and including the academic year 2008/09.

3.4.1 Student numbers, enrolments and mode of study

Student numbers in Scotland's colleges (headcount) rose steadily throughout the late 1990s, growing from 335,658 in 1998-99 and reaching a peak at 385,620 in 2001-02 before falling to the 2005-06 figure of 350,079 (SFC, 2007b). However, as Figure 1 illustrates, the number of students participating in a part-time further education (FE) course at Scotland's colleges surpassed the 2001-02 high for the first time in 2007-08 before falling slightly in 2008-09. This indicates a sustained demand for both FE and higher education (HE) at Scotland's colleges.

In the academic year 2008-09, 385,845 students (headcount) were studying at one of Scotland's 43 colleges (70,583 on full-time courses and 315,262 on part-time courses) with a total of 483,472 enrolments (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010). Enrolments do not always equate to the number of students studying at colleges since one student may enrol on multiple programmes in the same year and some students attend college while still at school as part of a school-college partnership so headcounts are more accurate predictors and will be used in the remainder of this chapter (Scottish Executive, 2005d).

Figure 1.



Source: www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010

As Figure 1 also illustrates, by far the most common mode of attendance Scotland's colleges was part time. This has historically been the main mode of study at colleges in Scotland and continues to make up the vast majority of provision. The most popular level of study over the same period was FE making up 88 per cent of provision in 2008-09 (www.sfc.ac.uk). The majority of students studying FE courses at college study part-time with only 13 per cent opting to study full-time.

The number of students studying both full and part time higher education (HE) at college remained fairly stable over the period 2000-01 to 2008-09. The number of students studying full time FE and HE courses has increased slightly to 70,521, reaching its largest total since 2004-05. This reflects the recent economic downturn. In times of economic recession, full-time provision traditionally rises as more people turn to college education in order to re-train.

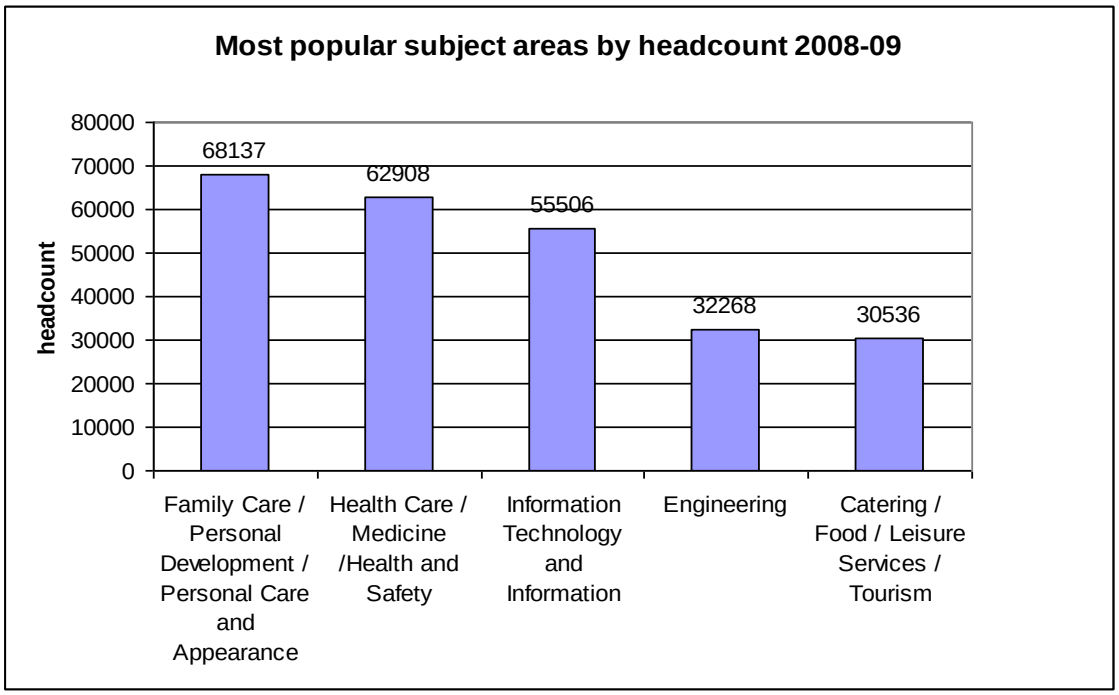
Programmes leading to a nationally recognised qualification accounted for 94 per cent of all activity in Scotland's colleges in the year 2008-09 (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010). This aligns to the

Scottish Government's economic agenda and the dominance of human capital theory within lifelong learning policy. Within this economic mode of thinking, if a course does not lead to a recognised qualification then its worth is called into question. The increasing emphasis on courses leading to a qualification is reflected in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The document *Worth Doing: Using the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework in Community Learning and Development*, was indicative of this move (Scottish Government, 2008b). Performance targets from the SFC encourage colleges to focus on student achievement and retention and it would appear that colleges are striving to achieve these targets.

3.4.2 Popularity of subject areas

Figure 2 illustrates the most common areas of study in Scotland's colleges in the academic year 2008-09. The popularity of subject areas such as Family Care/Personal Development/Personal Care and Appearance, Health Care/Medicine/Health and Safety, and Catering/Food/Leisure Services/Tourism can be attributed to the close links these course areas commonly have with local employers which contributes to their increased vocational relevance. Recent changes to registration requirements for working in healthcare and early education have also resulted in increased activity in these areas. Information Technology has continued to be popular due to employers expecting a certain level of competence with regards to core skills. Areas traditionally associated with colleges such as construction and engineering have remained popular due to on-going demand from the same group of students. These areas are still strong and often oversubscribed but have declined in relative importance reflecting the collapse of traditional industries in the 1980s.

Figure 2.

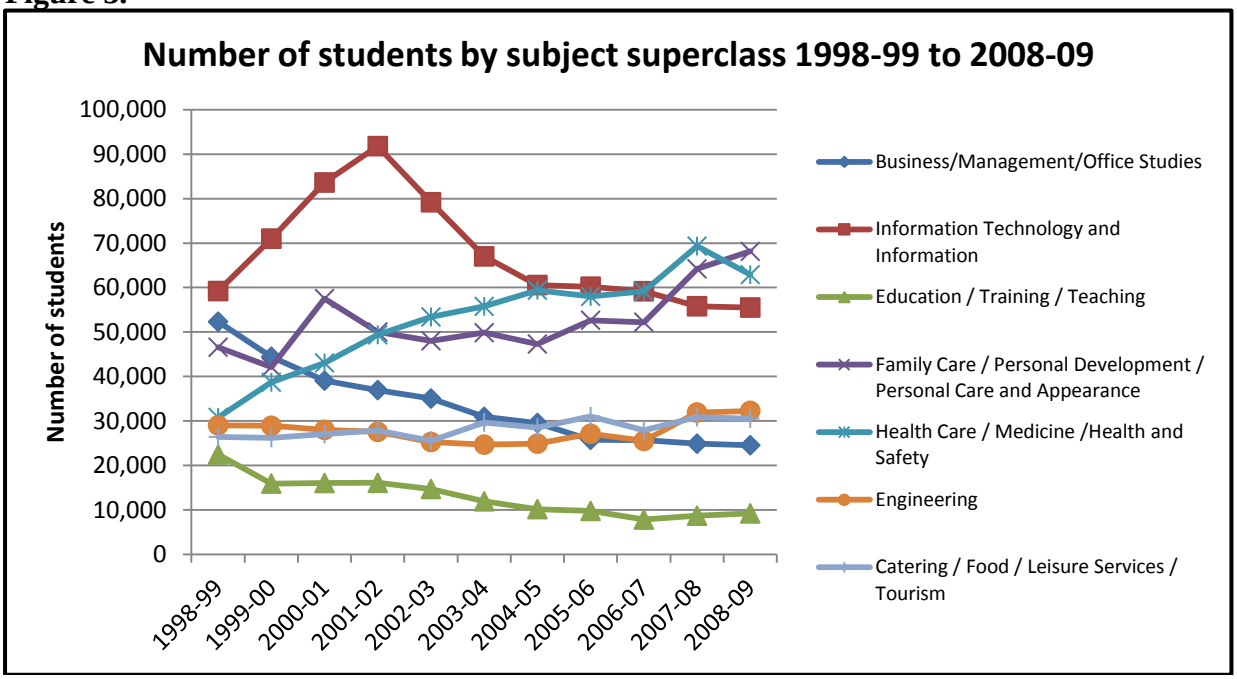


Source: www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010

These subject groups are classed as 'subject Superclasses' by the Scottish Funding Council and are based on the groups applied to individual programmes of study. This can lead to some areas, such as mathematics, being under-represented as it is more commonly included in other programmes such as business or engineering as a minor subject.

Figure 3 below illustrates how the popularity of these five subject superclasses changed over the period 1998-99 to 2008-09. This chart shows the rise in popularity of Health Care/Medicine/Health and Safety and Family Care/Personal Development/Personal Care and Appearance over this period. It also illustrates a significant peak in the early 21st century for Information Technology and Information courses which rose to 91,809 in 2001-02 before falling back to 55,506 in 2008-09. This rise can be attributed to the increased demand for call centre workers in the late 1990s. The chart also illustrates a significant decline in the popularity of Business/Management/Office Studies and Education/Training/Teaching courses over the same period.

Figure 3.

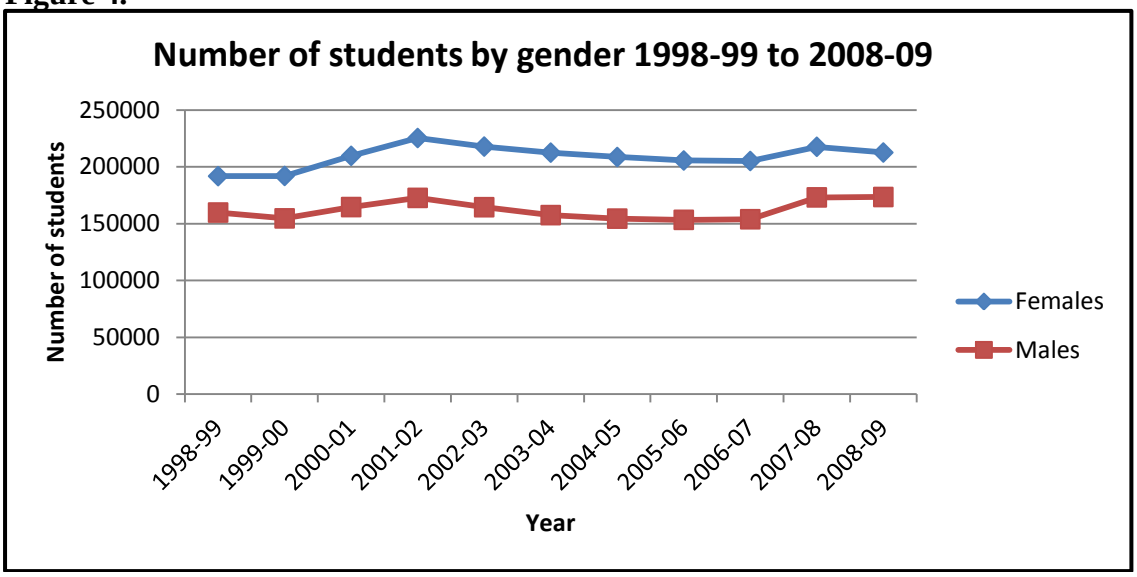


Source: www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010

3.4.3 Participation by gender in Scotland's colleges

With the decline of traditional industry in Scotland, came a decline in the number of males attending colleges. Equally, the number of women attending colleges in Scotland increased over the same period (Scottish Executive, 2006a). Women are now more likely than men to participate in some form of learning at Scotland's colleges accounting for 55 per cent of student activity. However, as Figure 4 shows, the gap in participation between men and women has been narrowing slightly following a peak in 2004-05 when participation rates for females were over 25 per cent higher than for males, the gender gap in 2008-09 was smaller than at any time since 2000-01

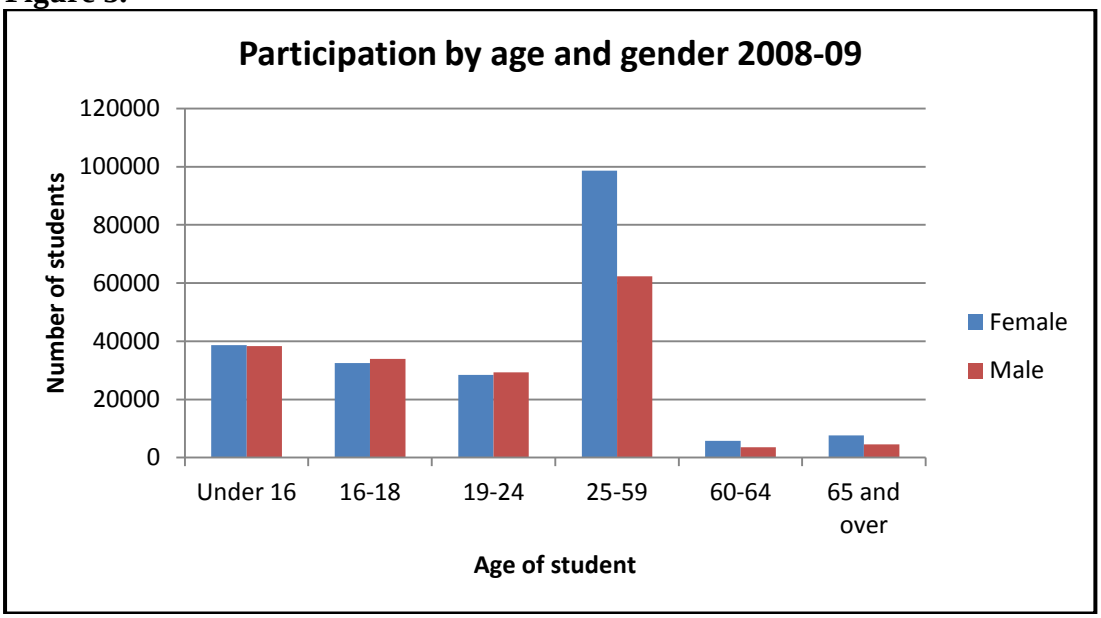
Figure 4.



Source: www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010

As Figure 5 illustrates, participation rates are higher for females from age 25 onwards with females significantly outnumbering males in the older age groups. Males outnumbered females in the 16-18 and 19-24 age groups only. The median age for males was 21 and the median age for females was significantly higher at age 27 (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010).

Figure 5.



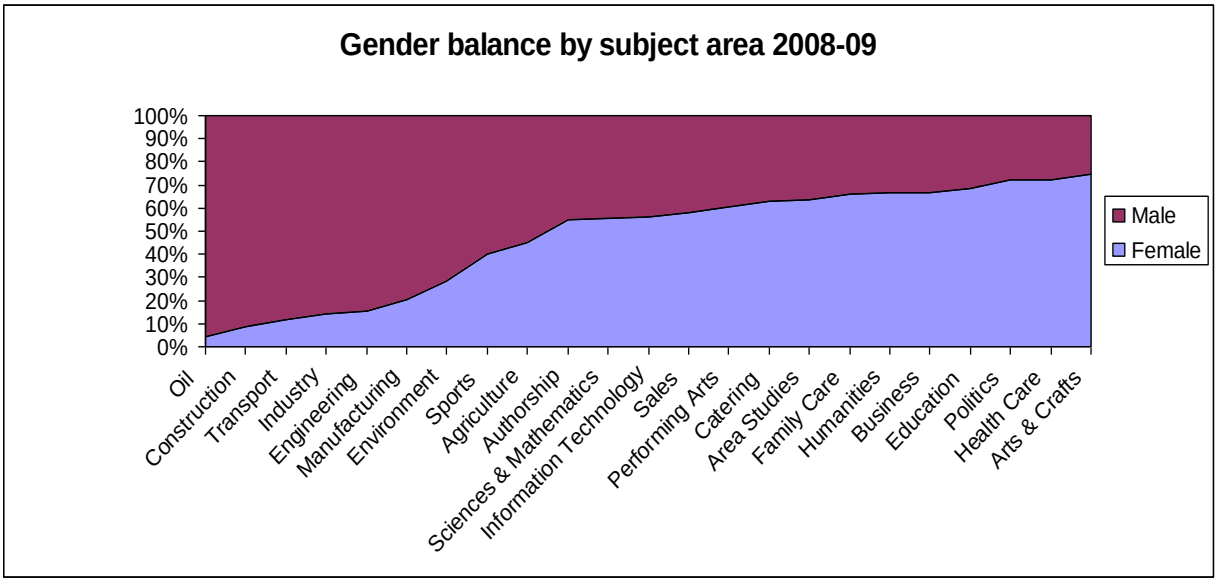
Source: www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010

It is clear that females greatly outnumber males in the 25-59 age group. However, these age groups are designated by the SFC and as such, it is difficult to compare groups such as the 16-18 age group, which has a very limited age range, with the much wider range of the 25-59 age group.

3.4.4 The influence of gender on subject choice

Whilst there is higher participation by women overall, there is strong evidence that choice of subject is influenced by gender. As figure 6 illustrates, there remain certain areas of the college curriculum which are heavily dominated by either males or females. Male dominated subjects traditionally include engineering, transport, construction, manufacturing, oil and chemicals and services to industry with males accounting for 78 per cent of overall student activity in these areas. Conversely, subjects such as arts and crafts, politics, education and health care are heavily dominated by females who account for 70 per cent of overall activity in these areas (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010).

Figure 6.



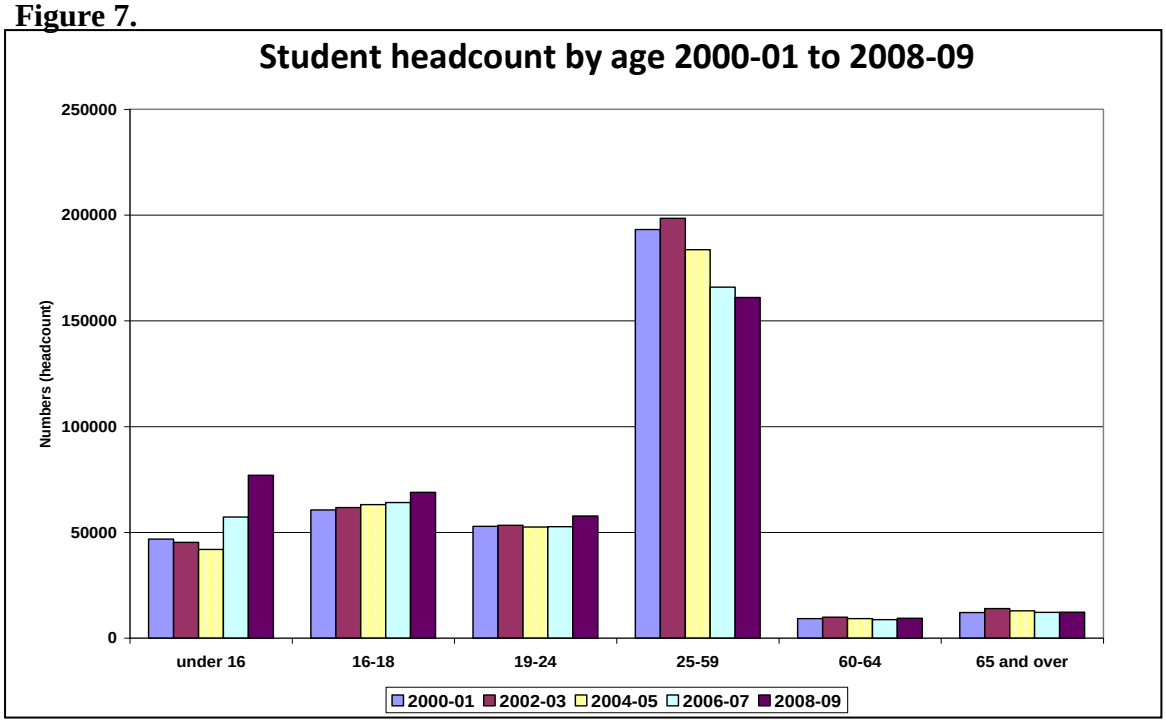
Source: www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010

A study by Cleary et al. (2007) examining the participation rates of males in post-compulsory education in the West of Scotland, found that many people still perceive there to be distinct jobs for men and for women. Men admitted to feeling under social pressures to choose certain courses at college and that they felt restricted in terms of course choices and job options. Where there was found to be a stigma attached to men attending further education courses, women were more likely to fill their free time with community-based learning. Younger men were found to view other activities such as finding gainful employment, getting married and buying a house as more important than returning to learning. The men interviewed in Cleary et al.'s study were seen as still quite instrumental in their approach to learning and were mainly attracted to courses which could enhance their manual/vocational skills. Men from traditional working-class backgrounds still felt that they needed to 'get their hands dirty' whilst women were more open to less labour-intensive job roles (Cleary et al., 2007).

3.4.5 The impact of an increase in younger learners

In previous years, the participation rates for both males and females peaked at the age of 17, with 35 per cent of 17 year-olds studying at Scotland's colleges (SFC, 2007b). However, as Figure 7 shows, in the academic year 2007-08, the number of students in the under 16 age group was greater than the number of students in the 16-18 and 19-24 age group. This was coupled with a drop in the number of students aged 25-59 from a peak in 2002-03. Students below the age of 16 who attend programmes at college tend to be doing so either as part of collaboration with a local secondary school, because they were winter school leavers or had been excluded from school (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010).

Figure 7.



Source: www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010

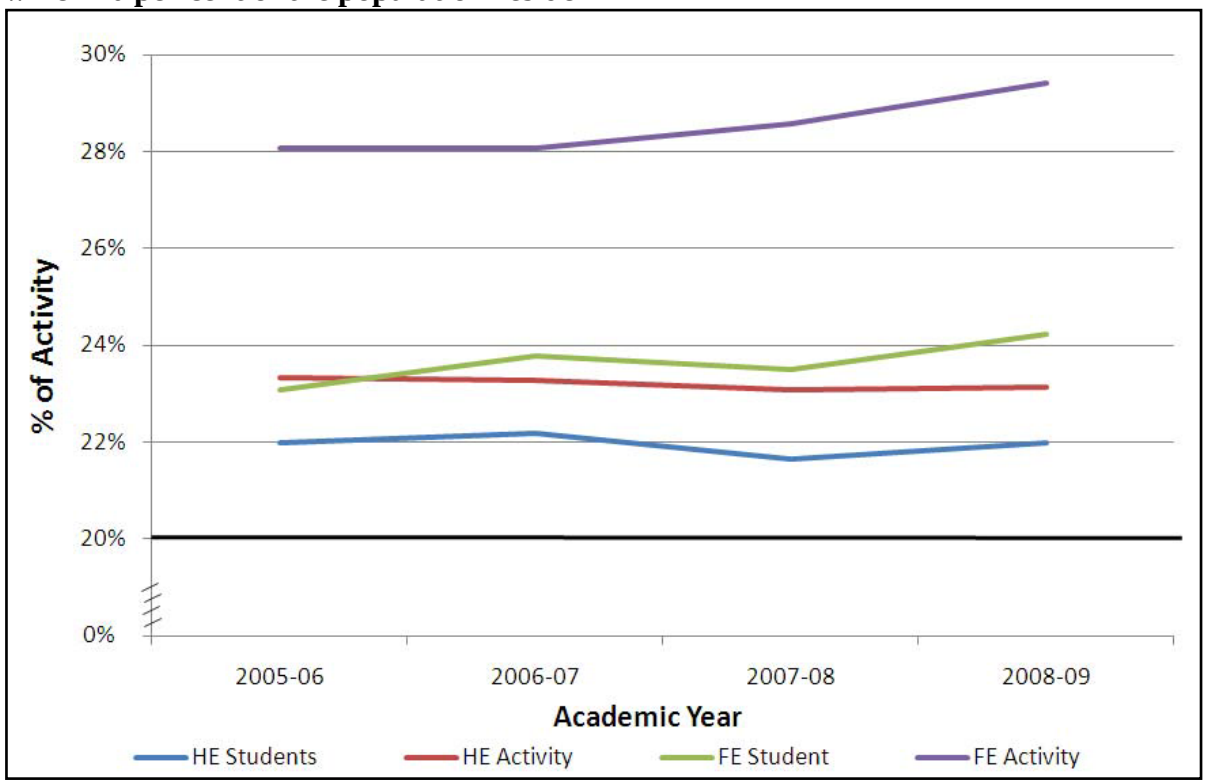
The percentage of school-leavers entering full-time FE or HE increased by 3 per cent since 2006-07. This coincided with a decrease of school-leavers entering employment with 25 per cent in 2007-08 compared with 28 per cent in 2006-07. The percentage of school-leavers who remain unemployed is unchanged at around 13 per cent (SFC, 2009). Despite the increase in school leavers entering full-time FE and HE, the number of young people not in education, employment or training still remains high in Scotland. However, there are problems in comparing these numbers due to the use of different age groups, even in different parts of the UK.

3.4.6 Participation by non-traditional students

The college sector plays an extremely important role in providing access to educational opportunities to those who reside within the most deprived areas of Scotland. Individuals who live in the most deprived areas are more likely to participate in colleges than those from more

affluent areas, with these people more likely to participate in the university sector (SFC, 2009). In Scotland's colleges, the distribution by deprivation quintiles is relatively evenly spread, particularly at HE level. In terms of the student population, 24 per cent of students engaged in FE and 22 per cent of students engaged in HE at Scotland's colleges were drawn from the 20 per cent most deprived areas in Scotland (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010). Conversely, although 20 per cent of Scotland's population live within the least deprived quintile, only 15 per cent of college activity was delivered to these students. This would suggest that nearly twice as much activity was delivered to students from the most deprived areas in comparison to those from the most affluent areas (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010). Despite increased investment, there is still much to be done in areas that continue to be affected by poor health, low educational attainment and poverty. Nearly a third of children in Scotland live in poverty and many Scots living in the most deprived areas of the country feel that they are excluded from the social and economic benefits which the rest of the nation enjoys. Figure 8 shows the percentage of activity from the 20 per cent most deprived areas between 2005-06 and 2008-09. In 2008-09, 29 per cent of all FE activity and 23 per cent of all HE activity was delivered to students from these areas. In terms of students, 24 per cent of FE students and 22 per cent of HE students were drawn from these areas (SFC, 2009b).

Figure 8: Percentage of activity from the 20 per cent most deprived areas in Scotland which 20 per cent of the population reside



Source: SFC, 2009b

3.4.7 Participation by disabled groups

Students with disclosed disabilities are well represented at Scotland's colleges when compared to their proportion in overall Scottish society. In 2008-09, 15 per cent of the student population in Scotland's colleges were classified as disabled or received additional learning support compared to 12 per cent in the overall Scottish population (www.scotland.gov.uk, 2010). However, these figures are subject to a degree of under-reporting as this information was refused/unknown/undefined for 30,445 students (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010).

3.4.8 Students from outside Scotland

In 2008-09, the total number of students who listed their home area as other than Scotland prior to study was 6,131. This broke down as 1,993 other UK, 2,299 EU and EEA and 1,839 other overseas. 86 per cent of students studying at Scotland's colleges in the year 2008-09 stated that their ethnic origin was 'White'. Again, this statistic is subject to under-reporting as this information was refused/unknown/undefined for 9 per cent of students (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010). The vast majority of students at Scotland's colleges live in the local college hinterland, and unlike universities, the colleges have not so far succeeded in recruiting significant numbers of overseas students.

3.5. Conclusion

The revised economic priorities of the Scottish Government have clearly influenced patterns and trends in Scotland's college sector. Statistics indicate that there is a high demand for college provision in Scotland. The recent economic downturn will only increase this demand as people turn to colleges in order to improve their employment prospects. The Scottish Government has highlighted the importance of the college sector in maintaining levels of human capital by providing a supply of skilled workers. The government perceives the role of the college sector as equipping people for employment. The most popular course areas at Scotland's colleges have close links with employment and reflect the Scottish Government's desire for college learning to relate directly to the labour market. The popularity of certain course areas are also strongly influenced by legal requirements concerning healthcare and early education. Gender also continues to play an important role in defining course areas as more suitable for males or females.

The growing influence of managerialism in the college sector in Scotland has led to colleges being judged by easily measurable performance targets which focus on levels of student achievement and enrolment rather than more complicated goals involving social cohesion and community engagement. As discussed, this could have a detrimental effect on social inclusion and social capital which in turn could have consequences for the generation and maintenance of human capital.

The Scottish Government has encouraged colleges to increase collaborative links with schools and universities. The increased drive to work with schools in particular, is part of the government's strategy to reduce the number of young people who leave school and do not enter employment, education or training. This has had a major effect on the student population in Scotland's colleges, resulting in larger numbers of younger learners under the age of 16 entering colleges. Colleges have also been encouraged to increase the vocational relevance of courses which cater for these younger learners. Due to the recent economic down-turn, the proportion of students classified as MCMC has risen, despite increased investment. The Scottish Government's attempts to reduce early school leaving by encouraging attendance at college by 'at risk' students has encountered some implementation problems, since, as illustrated in future chapters, college lecturers do not necessarily support this agenda.

4. RESEARCH METHODS

4.1 Methodology

This research explored the way in which Scottish Government policy regarding lifelong learning is mediated in three diverse colleges. It also examined to what extent the three colleges were able to reconcile their own institutional identity and culture with government policy. A qualitative methodology was chosen as the best method of enquiry for this research due to its capacity to present "long descriptive narratives", offering more detailed descriptions and analysis than statistics and tables (Silverman, 2001, p 33). The goal of qualitative research is to provide "theoretically grounded, analytical accounts of 'what happens' in reality" (Finch, 1985, p 113). It seeks to provide much more in-depth accounts of social behaviour in a way in which quantitative research cannot. In the past, many viewed qualitative research as a direct opponent of quantitative research and this has often led to an 'either/or' approach in social research. However, this approach has become far less common in the social sciences as many researchers have acknowledged that there no longer needs to be a division between qualitative and quantitative methods. Official statistics and data from previous research can be used to provide useful contextual information in order to present a more compelling argument.

In order to address the research aims and questions outlined in Chapter 1, the research methods employed in this study reflect a mainly qualitative approach, incorporating quantitative elements such as official statistical data provided by the Scottish Funding Council and the colleges themselves.

4.2 Institutional case studies

The main method of enquiry was the case study. This project involved institutional case studies of three colleges in Scotland. The case study method was chosen as it is an 'umbrella' term which "draws on the techniques of observational studies, and aims to give a portrayal of a specific situation in such a way as to illuminate some more general principle" (Nisbet and Watt, 1979, p 5). The case study method traditionally focuses on the characteristics of an individual unit. Herein lies the strengths and weaknesses of the method: it allows for an in-depth analysis of "the multifarious phenomena that constitute…the unit" (Cohen and Manion, 1980, p 99). However, the traditional weakness of the case study method is that it looks at a single instance and thus the results are not easily generalisable. In quantitative research, generalisation is achieved by using random samples of a population. This was unachievable in this research as this study was derived from a small number of cases and the cases were not selected at random (Silverman, 2001). Case studies are generalisable to theoretical propositions rather than populations. The case study is similar to a scientific experiment in that it does not represent a sample of the population. The researcher's goal in case study research, as in laboratory experiments, is to 'expand and generalise theories' (Yin, 1994, p 10). In this sense, there is an argument for the 'intrinsic case study' in which a case study is carried out as it holds enough value for its own sake. Sometimes case studies are "of sufficient interest in themselves to a target audience to have intrinsic value" (Gomm, Hammersley and Foster, 2000, p 99). As this project consisted of three case studies, comparative case studies were used to compare and contrast data from each of the colleges. Michael Berger's (1986) case survey method was applied which involved analysing the findings from several case studies, combining the various experiences and then drawing

conclusions from the various cases as a whole. Having three selected case studies provides a more robust data base for some limited generalisations.

4.2.1 Selecting the colleges

As Table 1 illustrates, the three colleges were selected to reflect differences in several key variables: geographical location; size according to student headcount; age of students; and percentage of students from deprived areas. Three colleges were selected across the central belt of Scotland to allow for some level of comparison between curriculum areas whilst accommodating for differences in local population and industry. The three colleges each represented institutions of different sizes according to student headcount for the year 2008-09: College A was a large college with over 15,000 students; College B was a small college with fewer than 7,000 students; and College C was a medium college with between 7,000 and 15,000 students. College A had a high proportion of learners under the age of 16 whereas the majority of students at Colleges B and C were in the 25-59 age range. The most popular subject areas according to student headcount were generally comparable across the three colleges with specific differences relating to the clientele of the college: College A had a high proportion of students on early education courses; College B had a high proportion of learners on ESOL courses due to its location close to a city centre with a high proportion of immigrants; and College C had a high proportion of health and safety provision run in partnership with local businesses.

Table 1: Characteristics of case study colleges

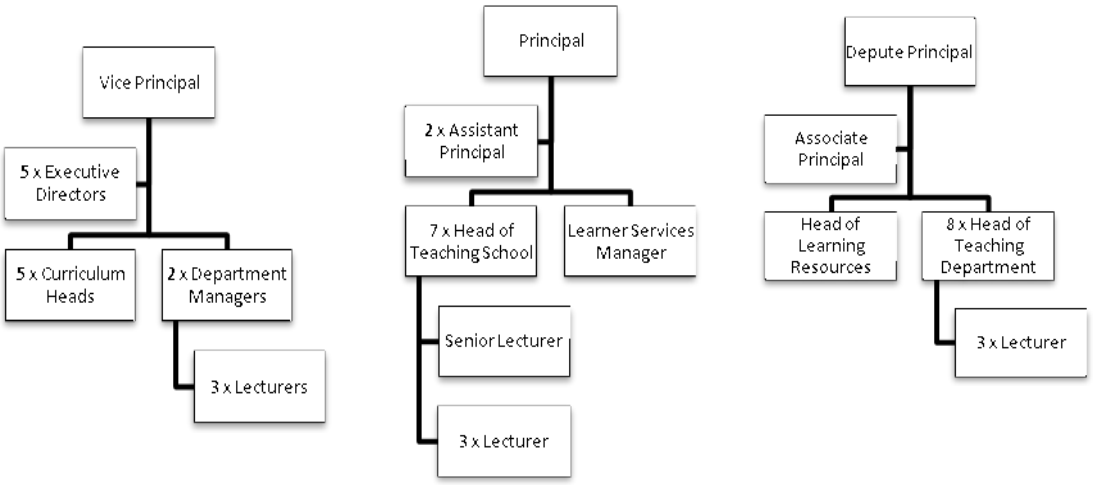
College A	College B	College C
Located in east central Scotland in multiple urban and rural campuses Large college (15,000 students and above) High percentage of students under the age of 16 (48%) Strong business development ethos and international agenda Low proportion of students on additional learning support (4 % of enrolments in FE and 2% in HE)	Located in west central Scotland in one city centre campus Small college (below 7,000 students) High percentage of students aged 25-59 (45%) Strong commitment to reaching under-represented groups High proportion of students from deprived areas (50% of enrolments in FE and 35% in HE) High proportion of students on additional learning support (21% of enrolments in FE and 6% in HE)	Located in mid central Scotland in multiple urban and rural campuses Medium college (between 7,000 and 15,000 students) High percentage of students aged 25-59 (46%) Strong business development ethos and links with local industries Growing international agenda Low proportion of students from deprived areas (17% of enrolments in FE and 12% in HE)

In order to gain access to the three colleges, letters were initially sent to each of the college principals requesting access to members of staff and students in order to seek their permission to conduct observations and interviews. The three colleges contacted were extremely accommodating to this wish and appointments were made to visit each college. At these initial meetings the possibility of conducting research within each college was discussed further and access was granted to members of staff from each subject department and each level required. The number of departments varied from college to college as did the management structure (see Figure 9). College A had a complicated management structure which included a principal, vice principal, executive directors and curriculum heads for each of the learning institutes along with department managers and teaching staff. This was partly due to the size of the college and the recent merger. College B had a more simple management structure which included a principal, assistant principals, a head of each of the seven teaching schools and teaching staff. College C also had a relatively complicated management structure which consisted of: a principal; a depute principal; associate

principals; heads of each of the 8 teaching departments; and teaching staff. Again, this college had recently grown in size as the result of a merger which had resulted in a degree of complexity surrounding its management structure.

Figure 9: Management structure of staff interviews at selected colleges

College A **College B** **College C**



The three case studies consisted of the following methods: interviews with various members of staff; focus group interviews with students (see appendices for full details of interview and focus group respondents); discourse analysis of official college documents and statistical data; and field notes from on site observations

4.2.2 Interviews with staff members at various levels

Qualitative methods share a common belief that they can "provide a deeper understanding" of social interactions than quantitative methods (Silverman, 2000, p 8). In order to gain a deeper insight into the degree to which the ethos and missions of the colleges were transmitted to the members of staff, one-to-one interviews were conducted. In case studies of educational

institutions, the interview is the most commonly-used research method and was utilised here in order to provide a deeper understanding of the culture of the colleges and the social interactions within.

In total, 45 interviews were conducted with various members of staff consisting of 16 interviews from College A, 15 from College B and 14 from College C as shown in Figure 9 (please see Appendix C for full details of interview respondents). These numbers varied according to the structure of the college management and the availability of the staff members. The intention was to interview different levels of college staff (senior management; heads of departments; lecturers; and student support staff) in order to establish if there were any differences between the views of different levels of staff and address the research questions detailed in Chapter 1. It was also intended that the staff should represent the different course areas on offer within the college. Therefore, staff members were selected to represent each of the colleges' main course areas (5 learning institutes in College A, 7 teaching schools in College B and 8 teaching departments in College C). These criteria were fulfilled with the exception of members of student support staff at College A who were unavailable for interviewing at the time the research was conducted. Several members of teaching staff at each college were also unavailable however; even with such a small number of interviews it was noticeable that some saturation of categories was evident (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

4.2.3 Missing data

The qualitative sample must be large enough to ensure that diverse perceptions are heard (DePaulo, 2000). Therefore, the smaller the sample size, the narrower the range of

perceptions. The omission of student support staff from College A, and the small number of lecturers interviewed, presents a limitation of this research. The time involved in setting up and conducting interviews meant that if a staff member was unable to make their designated interview slot then it was very difficult to re-schedule. Although efforts were made to try and include as wide a range of staff as possible, it was not possible to include all of the identified members of staff in the time frame this research afforded. A larger number of interviews with college lecturers may have resulted in more varied opinions, especially between lecturers from different course areas. It may also have allowed more robust conclusions to be made. The support staff at College A may have also offered an important perspective on College A and their omission is recognised as having a detrimental effect on this research.

4.2.4 The advantages and disadvantages of using interviews

One advantage of interviewing is that it allows a greater depth than other research methods such as questionnaires. The researcher has greater control over the research situation, ensuring that "the respondents answer the questions in the appropriate sequence or that they answer certain questions before they are asked subsequent questions" (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996, p 237). The personal interview can also result in a higher response rate than an impersonal postal or on-line questionnaire. The interview is a flexible way of discovering people's thoughts and feelings on a matter. Asking someone directly is often seen as a shortcut to understanding their thoughts and feelings and gaining answers to research questions (Robson, 1993, p 272). It is this flexibility, however, that raises the most questions regarding the validity of the qualitative interview. A lack of standardisation is often addressed in qualitative textbooks. Many methods textbooks suggest that it is very important that each interviewee has the same understanding of the questions they are asked and give the same

sort of answers (Silverman, 2001). However, by concentrating on the validity of the interview, important details concerning the underlying meaning can be overlooked. Too much focus on the standardisation of the interview can overlook the issues that the interviewee might find important and deny them the opportunity to talk about them. The amount of control the researcher exerts over the interview process changes when moving from the structured to the unstructured interview. In an unstructured interview, the focus is no longer on trying to 'teach' the respondent to "reply in accordance with the interview schedule" (May, 2001, p 121). Instead, the interviewee is encouraged to answer a question in their own way and on their own terms. It is important to note that structured interviewing is not simply associated with positivism, neither is unstructured interviewing a reflection of a social construction approach (May, 2001). The interviews conducted with the members of college staff were semi-structured meaning that there was a pre-determined interview schedule but there was also room for the interviewer to have flexibility and freedom (See Appendix A). Although this can be one of the least flexible forms of interviewing, it allowed the sequence of the questions asked to be the same in every interview. This also allowed any variations in responses to be attributed to differences between the respondents and not to changes in the interview structure. In order to minimise human error, a systematic approach was taken to the interview process. The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and then transcribed by the researcher. Notes were also taken regarding tone and inflection and any other remarks made whilst the interview was in progress.

One disadvantage of interviewing is that it can incur a higher cost than surveys or questionnaires if additional interviewers are employed. Also the cost of transcribing the data can be high. However, no extra assistance was required for either conducting the interviews or transcribing. Problems may also arise as to the interviewer's subjectivity and bias when

dealing with flexible unstructured interviews. Lack of standardisation leaves the interview process highly vulnerable to interviewer bias. The interviewer's race or gender may also influence the responses given as respondents may not feel comfortable giving some answers or may feel that they should give a particular answer in an attempt to please the interviewer. There is also the issue of anonymity to consider. With an anonymous mail or electronic questionnaire, respondents may feel that they can be more honest. They may feel intimidated or threatened by the presence of an interviewer, particularly if questions are being asked on sensitive topics. However, there is a prevailing school of thought within the qualitative methodology that the interview is not simply a process of collecting data from an interviewee, but an active engagement of both parties. In this view, the interviewer and the respondent are both equally engaged in the goal of 'constructing meaning on some topic' (Esterberg, 2002, p 88). The interaction between the interviewer and interviewee is "a hallmark of all interviews" (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004, p 140). In this sense, all interviews are 'active interviews' which involve the input of both the researcher and the research subject. The traditional criticism that the interview is filled with potential for bias and misunderstanding no longer holds weight. The idea stressed by the technical literature that the interaction should be kept in check, places the emphasis on "maximising the flow of valid, reliable, information" and "minimising distortions" of the respondents' information (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004, p 141). All of the participants involved in the interview are implicated in the construction and interpretation of meaning. Rather than the interviewer being accused of contaminating the account of the respondent, they are now involved in its creation. The interview is no longer simply a means for transporting knowledge, but an active process of knowledge construction.

4.2.5 Focus group interviews with students

Focus group interviews were conducted with students on order to help address the overarching research question: *What is government policy in relation to Scotland's colleges and how is this mediated differently in three diverse colleges?* The intention was to interview students from manual, vocational course areas which commonly contained high numbers of young males and compare and contrast this group with students from more academic courses which had a greater potential to attract a wider demographic. This was intended to establish whether students in different vocational areas differed with regards to their experiences, motivations and expectations of college education.

A total of six focus groups were conducted (two focus groups in each college) consisting of one group of students on more manual, vocational courses and one group containing students on more academic, classroom-based additions to the college curriculum. 45 students were interviewed in total consisting of a mix of ages and gender including learners under the age of 16 (see Appendix D for full details). Gaining access to the students was found to be more difficult than gaining an interview with the members of staff. The selection of students was partly opportunistic due to the difficulties inherent in recruiting groups of students for interview purposes. When initially contacting the colleges, the desire to interview groups of students from specific course areas was mentioned. This was then followed up by approaching the relevant heads of departments following their interviews in order to set up the focus groups. The heads of department subsequently organised a group of students from their department which they felt would best represent their vocational area. The students were not individually selected and are not entirely representative of the student population since the majority of those interviewed fall within the 16-24 age range, however, the sample does

include representatives from 25-59 age range which makes up the majority of the student population in Scotland's colleges. However, it should be noted that by recruiting students in this manner, no students were interviewed from groups such as disabled students on work development programmes, asylum seekers or refugees on ESOL courses or students with learning difficulties. Only a small proportion of the students interviewed were classed as international students whose home area prior to study was outside of the UK. These types of courses alongside non-certificated, leisure courses might be more geared towards social capital development and these different groups of students could have offered different perspectives and an insight into the social inclusion of the colleges.

4.2.6 The focus group method

The decision to conduct focus groups instead of one-to-one interviews with the students was made in order to secure access to larger numbers of students and in order to make the students feel more comfortable about answering the questions posed to them. Focus group discussions are often used for the purpose of exploring people's thoughts and feelings and obtaining detailed information about a particular issue. Focus group discussions were felt to be a good way to allow the students' feelings to emerge naturally. Focus groups are a relatively easy and efficient way to interview a number of people at the same time. They also allow people to express thoughts and feelings which they might not express if interviewed as individuals. Focus groups are held to be more 'naturalistic' than one-to-one interviews. Due to the group nature of the focus group, the social interaction of the group allows for greater synergy as individuals can 'bounce ideas' off each other. Focus groups contain a range of communicative processes that take place between members of the group - storytelling, joking, arguing and disagreement (Wilkinson, 2004). Although there is some feeling that people are

less inclined to ‘open up’ in a group, it has been found that group discussion of sensitive issues “may actually facilitate personal disclosures” by reassuring members of the group that they are not alone in their experiences (Wilkinson, 2004, p 180). By playing off each other, focus groups often generate more detailed, elaborate accounts than individual interviews.

However, because of the increased number of participants, focus groups afford the researcher far less control over the process than one-to-one interviews and it takes a certain skill to be able to effectively manage and guide a group discussion as the success of the focus group can often depend on the skill of the moderator. It can sometimes be difficult to persuade individuals to give up their free time to take part in the group. Some individuals in the group may feel the pressure to conform rather than venture forth their own opinions. In a similar approach to the interviews with staff members, semi-structured interview schedules were applied to the focus groups which provided some level of control whilst at the same time allowing the sessions to flow naturally (See Appendix B). The focus group allows the participants more freedom to create their own topics of conversation and speak freely. As Cottle has argued, without allowing people to speak freely and by imposing restrictions we will never know what their real intentions are, and what the true meaning of their words might be (Cottle, 1978). The focus groups were recorded in a similar manner to the interviews with staff members using a digital voice recorder. However, in order to keep track of which respondent was speaking the students were each assigned a number according to their position in the room which corresponded to a diagram held by the researcher. Each time a new person spoke their number was noted by the researcher on the interview schedule and this was then transferred to the transcript. It was also made clear when arranging the groups that the focus groups should take place in a self-contained room with no distractions. The students were not urged to speak one at a time as it was thought that this could inhibit their

responses and make them more reluctant to contribute but this did not prove to be an issue as the vast majority of the students spoke clearly and waited in turn to respond.

4.3 Data analysis

The interviews and focus groups resulted in a large amount of data. This is very common in case study research. A way to handle and make sense of these large amounts of data is to condense the information into meaningful statements or identify broad themes and categories. These analytical statements or themes "need to be firmly based on the raw data, and may suggest the need for more specific data to be collected" (Bassey, 1999, p 70). In case study research, data collection and analysis is a simultaneous activity. Data analysis begins with the first data collected, be it an interview, observation or reading of a document (Merriam, 1998). Tentative hypotheses or emerging insights from initial data collection can inform the next phase. This in turn can lead to the refinement of questions.

4.3.1 Identifying themes and categories in the interview data

A set of broad tentative themes were used initially to inform the interview schedules. Devising the categories was a systematic process informed by the study's purpose and research questions. These themes were: Ethos of college; Lifelong learning policy; Student demographics; The future of FE. These themes were then used to initially organise the raw data. Once the first interviews were transcribed, the data that was found to be potentially relevant and best addressed the research questions was used to further develop the codes and categories. The categories were named according to what was reflected in the data and

themes which were identified in the review of literature and policy. These categories reflected the purpose of the research and in essence acted as the answers to the research questions.

Once the next set of interviews were transcribed and coded according to this process, they were checked to determine whether the codes were present or if any further codes were identified. This was then repeated with the next set of interviews. These lists were then merged into a master list of themes derived from all of the sets of data. As Merriam describes:

> *This master list constitutes a primitive outline or classification system reflecting the recurring regularities or patterns in your study. These patterns and regularities become the categories or themes into which subsequent items are sorted (Merriam, 1998, p 181).*

Once all of the interviews had been transcribed and coded the master list of themes was: entry requirements, ethos of college; evidence of success; incentives to widen access; influential bodies; lifelong learning policy; nature of courses; performance indicators; student demographics; student support mechanisms; widening participation; targeted groups; and the future of FE. The interview transcripts were reviewed for any quotes which fitted into one of the previously identified categories and new themes were created for any quotes which did not fit into one of the previously identified categories. This resulted in the creation of three new categories: views of college mergers; working with younger students; and developing the college estate.

4.3.2 Sub-category analysis

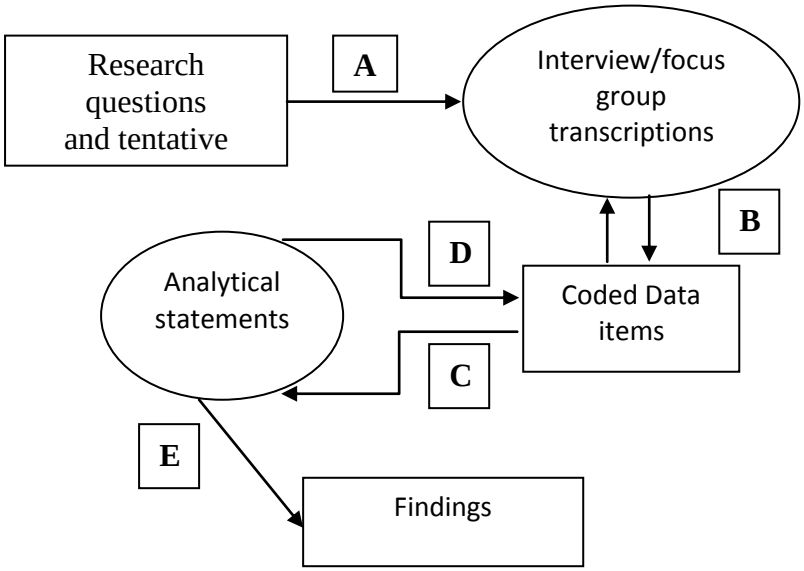
Then sub-categories were created in the process of analysing the interview data and were used to identify further information about the data being collected. Descriptive categories were used to initially separate the interview data into sub-groups. These *four* broad categories were: level of staff (senior management, middle management, lecturers, support staff); department; how long they had been employed by the college; and which college they were employed by previous to the merger (colleges A and C). The focus group interviews were also separated according to the following three categories: age; gender; course area. Second-level analytical statements were then generated in order to further explore the original master list of themes. Figure 10 below outlines the data analysis process.

4.3.3 Identifying themes and categories in the focus group data

As with the staff interviews, a set of broad tentative themes were used initially to inform the focus group schedules. These themes were: the course; the college; the student population and social interaction; widening access to learning; the courses on offer at the college; student support; the local community; building connections with others. The focus group transcripts were reviewed for any quotes which fitted into one of the previously identified categories and new themes were created for any quotes which did not fit into one of the previously identified categories. This resulted in the creation of two new categories: impressions of younger students; and developing the college estate. As the analysis progressed, the process of extracting quotes was dependent on how each quote could add to the explanatory power of the relevant category (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 1999). Each transcript was then re-assessed to

identify any relevant quotes which could add to any of the categories and had been originally missed.

Figure 10: Outline of data analysis



A. The research questions and tentative themes identified from the literature and policy reviews were used to create interview schedules, leading to raw data.
B. Raw data from transcriptions are coded according to further themes which in turn, informs further interviews.
C. Creative and reflective thinking about the data items leads to draft analytical statements.
D. the draft analytical statements are tested against the data items and amended or discarded as necessary. C and D together are an iterative process aimed to get the most from the data.
E. Once the data has been analysed using NVivo and the iterative process is exhausted the analytical statements are re-expressed as findings.

Adapted from Bassey, 1999, p 85

The qualitative data from the interviews with members of college staff and the focus groups conducted with students was analysed using the software package NVivo. The transcriptions were entered into NVivo as raw data and coded under the list of categories detailed above. The data was then divided into meaningful statements in order to identify similar phrases, relationships between themes, distinct differences between subgroups and common sequences. The analysis of the qualitative data was subject to some degree of quantification. Thirteen free nodes were initially identified according to the broad themes created as

described above. Commonalities and differences were isolated between respondents from each college and between respondents across all three colleges. Using a data analysis package such as NVivo allows the researcher to quickly generate coding using auto-coding and identify themes and commonalities between cases using the queries function. Any generalisations were gradually elaborated and confronted with a formalised body of knowledge in the form of the theoretical understandings presented in chapters 2 and 3.

An example of a meaningful statement included in the analysis was:

> *The priorities are improving the local economy, working nationally and internationally, working with learners as individuals and improving their social outlook, their social understanding, developing the individual with a view to progressing them on to higher education or back into the economy.*

This data provides an example of key words and phrases which were coded according to the free nodes identified above. This allowed any data which contained these key words and phrases to be quickly recalled and compared with other responses containing similar key words and phrases.

An example of data deemed to be out-with the research parameters was:

> *Another area I failed to mention was maths; we are doing maths as well, so that is the sort of background of the school. Personally I have been involved with the college for 34 years in January in a number of different roles, I was originally in engineering, it went quiet for a number of years and I got a degree in IT and computing when*

computing was in its infancy in the 1980s so I was there at the beginning and I went along with that over time.

Although this data contained information on subject areas, it focused on the respondent's history and did not adhere to the free nodes identified above. Much of this personal data was not used within the study as it fell outside of the research parameters identified at the beginning of the analysis.

4.4 Discourse analysis of college documents and statistics

Discourse analysis is often used somewhat implicitly in qualitative research. Interviews and field notes are analysed for their content. This content is analysed for themes and recurring patterns of meaning (Merriam, 1998). Institutional documents such as college prospectuses, mission statements and web-based sources were examined and analysed according to a discourse-based analysis using a framework based on the research questions in order to gain important background information on the colleges' missions and understanding of lifelong learning as well as their individual college ethos and identity. This allowed for a deeper look at how the colleges' "identifications, discursive self-positionings, and aspirations are manifested in the language used" (Forbes and Weiner, 2008, p 511). Discourse analysis centres on the frequency and variety of messages and the focus of these messages. This process involved the construction of categories that captured the relevant characteristics of the document's content and analysed them according to the theoretical underpinnings of this study. This included the mediation of government policy on lifelong learning, the balance between economic and social objectives, and the institutional culture of the college.

Institutional documents such as college prospectuses, corporate plans/annual reports, equalities schemes as well as college websites were analysed according to these main themes. This study also involved gathering and analysing data gathered by the Scottish Funding Council, the colleges themselves and the Association of Scotland's Colleges. This data included information on participation by different social groups (in relation to social class, gender, disability, age and ethnicity) on different courses which provided useful contextual and comparative information. Key statistical indicators were analysed in depth using the Scottish Funding Council's Infact database (www.sfc.ac.uk). These statistical indicators included variables such as: Age of student (start of academic year); Level of study; Disability; Ethnic origin; Students home area prior to study; Gender; Percentage of students from deprived areas; and Mode of attendance of course. These key indicators were studied for each of the three colleges and for the college sector as a whole so that each of the institutions could be placed in a wider context.

4.5 Observational data

Observational data was also used in order to represent a first-hand encounter with the environment of the colleges. It is common in case study research for observation to be combined with interviews and, to a lesser degree, documentary analysis (Merriam, 1998). Observational research has been criticised as it tends to rely on human perception which can be highly selective and therefore unreliable. However, everyday observation is differentiated from research-related observation due to the skill of the researcher and the systematic approach they take (Wolcott, 1992). A researcher can notice things which may have become routine to others. When used in conjunction with documentary analysis, observations can be

used to substantiate the findings. Elements which were observed during this study included the following adapted from a checklist by Merriam (1998, p 97).

- The physical setting: what is the environment of the college like? What kinds of behaviour is the setting designed for? How is space allocated? What objects, resources, technologies are in the setting?
- The staff and students: Who is in the scene? How many people and what are their relevant characteristics? What brings these people together? Who is not here and who would be expected to be here?
- Activities and interactions: What is going on? Is there a definable sequence of activities? How do the people interact with the activity and with one another? What norms or rules structure the activities and interactions?

4.6 Validity, reliability and ethical considerations

This research followed the Ethics Framework of the College of Humanities and Social Science, University of Edinburgh, taking into account the dignity, health and safety of all participants. All participants were informed about the aims and purposes of the research, the likely publication of the findings, the context in which the findings will be reported and any potential consequences for the individuals. Informed consent was sought and the participants were requested to sign a consent form prior to the interviews. The participants were also informed that they could withdraw from participation at any time.

4.6.1 Confidentiality and anonymity

The field of qualitative research is inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions. Problems of confidentiality and anonymity frequently arise during case study research. It is difficult to maintain confidentiality when the case study concerns a small community. By providing only a few details about participants or locations, it is easy enough for others to guess the participant's identity or the location of the study (Esterberg, 2002). Anonymity for individuals and research sites is an almost unquestioned belief in standard ethical practice and is "embodied in the various ethical guidelines and codes of practice which are produced by various professional associations" (Walford, 2005, p 83). All participants were assured that their contribution would be kept strictly anonymous and all efforts have been made to ensure that no names or personal details were used in this research. Efforts have also been made to keep the identity of the colleges anonymous, however; it is also acknowledged that by providing certain details about the colleges there is a danger that their identity could be easily discovered. Anonymity has become the 'default' option for most qualitative field work, yet it often does not work and it is difficult to see how it can ever really work if "what is being said in the reports is significant and worthwhile" (Walford, 2005, p 85).

4.6.2 Reliability and validity of qualitative methods

As we have seen, the main criticisms of qualitative research seem to concern the 'holy trinity' of validity, reliability and objectivity (Spencer et al., 2003). The main problem for qualitative researchers is that the existing categories of validity, reliability and objectivity are "based on positivist assumptions that underlie quantitative and experimental research designs"

(Maxwell, 1992, p 279). Most qualitative research methods rely on note taking, or transcription from audio or video recordings. As such, the reliability of the researcher's interpretation is often called into question. These interpretations can be "gravely weakened by a failure to note apparently trivial, but often crucial, pauses, overlaps or body movements" (Silverman, 2001, p 33). All efforts were made to address this concern by audio recording the interviews and focus groups allowing the interviewer to concentrate on the respondents' attitudes and body language.

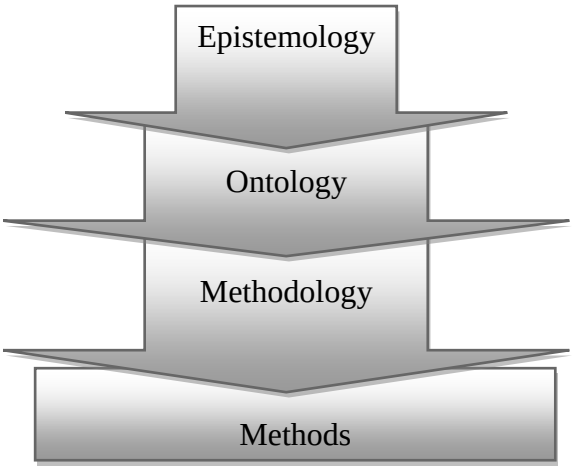
Another general criticism with regards to the validity of qualitative research is known as the problem of 'anecdotalism' (Silverman, 2001; Bryman, 1988). This problem relates to conclusions or explanations in qualitative research that rely on conversations, unstructured interviews or story-like examples of phenomenon without any attempt to analyse the data (Bryman, 1988). The positivistic notion of reliability assumes that scientific inquiry can be replicated. Qualitative researchers often begin from an assumption that the world is in a constant state of flux, which makes the concept of replication problematic. Again, we must be wary of this assumption, because if it is correct then "we cannot assume any stable properties in the social world" and if this is the case then why should we study them at all? (Silverman, 2001, p 226). Whereas some researchers deny that the scientific paradigm is relevant to their research, others have argued that qualitative methods have their own procedures for attaining validity. One approach that some researchers have used to verify their findings is known as 'triangulation'. This approach involves comparing different methods to see whether they corroborate one another. However this method also has its critics. As Fielding and Fielding argue, "rarely does the inaccuracy of one approach to the data complement the accuracies of another" (Fielding and Fielding, 1986, p 35). Another technique that many researchers use to promote validity in their methods involves taking the research findings back to the subjects

who were initially studied (Silverman, 2001). The participants can then validate whether the researcher's interpretation of events matches their intentions. This method is known as respondent validation.

4.6.3 Epistemological and ontological assumptions

As previously discussed, many qualitative researchers feel that objectivity is not an achievable or even desirable aim of social research. Max Weber (1946) pointed out that all research is contaminated to some extent by the values the researcher brings to the process. If objectivity is not a goal and all knowledge is created within human interaction, who we are shapes "the kinds of theories we create and the kinds of explanations we offer" (Esterberg, 2002, p 12). If this is the case then it is essential that the researcher is 'reflexive' and aware of their ontology and epistemology. The term 'epistemology' relates to the study of knowledge and how this is possible. The term 'ontology' is to do with our assumptions and knowledge about how the world is made up and the nature of things (Freimuth, 2009). Crotty (1998) discusses how these elements of the research process inform one another (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Four elements of the research process



Adapted from Crotty, 1998, p 4

It is important to be reflective when conducting research since it is contaminated with our beliefs and knowledge. This research developed from a subjectivist epistemology based on the epistemological assumption that truth does not exist in a separate vacuum from research contexts and participants (Somekh and Lewin, 2005). Subjectivism is often linked to qualitative research. A post-positivist ontology was adopted wherein knowledge is gained by observing lived experience via predominately qualitative research methods (Freimuth, 2009). Any data collected this way is open to interpretation and criticism (Weber, 2004). Using multiple methods of data collection, such as those detailed above, is one way of ensuring valid results. Elements of critical theory/critical inquiry were also used to develop the research questions which challenge the various assumptions underlying education, theory and practice. As stated by Giroux (1981) educators themselves are the product of a given educational system and are potentially steeped in bias and a specific historical context. This research addresses critical questions such as: within government policy, how are human and social capital objectives balanced; how do particular colleges reconcile their own institutional identity and culture with government policy; and how has government policy on educating young students been adopted in each college?

Much qualitative fieldwork has been criticised for its lack of generalisability. Guba and Lincoln have questioned whether law-like generalisations have a place in the social sciences. They answered the criticisms of qualitative research by offering the concept of 'transferability' (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). This implied that those who read the results of case studies or ethnographies must themselves determine whether the findings can be applied to other cases.

4.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, although there are many issues and criticisms concerning qualitative research methods, they can offer far greater depth with regards to social issues than quantitative methods. Qualitative researchers do not need to accept the argument that qualitative methods can only be used for exploratory stages of research. Qualitative methods provide the "colour" and reflect "the subjective reality of the people being studied" (Finch, 1985, p 113). By doing this, they can make a special contribution to our understanding of what it is actually like to be in a particular social situation or circumstance. By utilising qualitative methods in this manner, it is possible to understand the characteristics of the three institutions studied and go some way to exploring the students' motivations and experiences whilst attending college. However, researchers do have a duty to themselves and others to "reflect upon and acknowledge both the strengths and weaknesses of the different methods that they employ" (May, 2001, p 143). As previously stated, qualitative methods can complement quantitative methods and it is in the successful combination of both methods that the future of social research lies. In-depth analysis of key statistical indicators for each college provides the relevant background information allowing each institution to be placed in a wider context. The case study method was chosen due to its provision of a richer, deeper understanding of some of the underlying issues so that general principles may be highlighted.

5. COLLEGE MISSION AND PROMOTION OF COLLEGE IDENTITY

5.1 Introduction

Colleges in Scotland face the difficult task of adhering to Scottish Government policy and funding targets whilst also striving to promote their individual mission and identity, which may include community engagement and development. As discussed in Chapter 1, incorporation led to duplication of provision across much of the college sector as colleges expanded the range of courses on offer in order to meet performance indicators often at the risk of losing their individual identity. In an effort to combat homogenisation, many colleges have increased their marketing output in order to create brand identities and differentiate themselves from the rest of the sector.

The colleges also differ in their approach to mediating Scottish Government lifelong learning policy. As discussed in Chapter 2, the current Scottish Government has placed an increased focus on the economic benefits of lifelong learning through various policy documents. Whilst Scottish Government policy clearly provides the backdrop for each college, the particular features of each college result in distinctly different cultural landscapes.

This chapter draws on official college and Scottish Government policy documents, college promotional material and high level interviews with senior members of college staff. Statistics from the Scottish Funding Council have also been analysed in order to compare key indicators from each of the three colleges against each other and against the Scottish college sector as a whole. The aim of the chapter is to explore the way in which three colleges,

differing in history, geographical location and culture attempted to preserve their individual identity whilst conforming to SFC and Scottish Government policies and priorities.

5.2 Key characteristics of the three colleges

As detailed in Chapter 4, the three colleges were selected for this study due to various factors such as their size, geographical location and the characteristics of the student population. College A was the largest of the three colleges included in this study, catering for over 29,876 students (headcount) and employing over 900 staff in the academic year 2008/09 (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010). In comparison, College B was the smallest of the three colleges in terms of student numbers serving 6,522 students and employing around 400 members of staff. College C was a medium sized college, catering for 12,875 and employing 600 staff members in 2008/09 (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010). All three colleges were located within Scotland's central belt, however, Colleges A, B and C were located in East, West and Central Scotland respectively. The main campuses of Colleges A and C were located in towns whilst the main campus of College B was situated in a busy city centre. College A operated five campuses across three towns in the region and College C delivered provision across 4 campuses located in 3 towns. In contrast, College B operated out of one main campus.

5.2.1 History of the local area

All three of the colleges were founded with similar objectives: to provide training and support to local industry. However, since their early beginnings, the colleges have developed differently. Colleges A and C were both created by merging previously existing colleges (discussed in more detail in a later section) which meant that they developed in a very

different way to College B. The history of the colleges' local area greatly influenced the development of all three colleges.

The main campus of College A occupies a site which has been a location of educational activity since 1843. The college which was located in this town (prior to the merger) developed in the early 20th century providing training for mining students. This led to the opening of the mining school in 1926. In 1952 this became a technical college, merging with other technical colleges in 1973. Traditional industry in this area was coal mining and textiles and this was the main focus for the technical college. The second college which merged to become College A opened in 1968 to provide support and training to the local manufacturing and engineering industries. The town in which the second college was situated was founded in the 1940s to house miners from the local coal mining industry. Once this industry collapsed, the town developed between 1961 and 2000 to become an important centre of Scotland's 'Silicon Glen'. The college expanded in the early 1970s, specialising in paper manufacturing, mechanical engineering and electrical engineering. A second institute was built for sports and physical education, also providing a sports centre for the town. In the early 21st century, the public service, financial and retail sectors dominate the local economy of both towns.

College B is located in a large city where the traditional industries were heavy engineering, construction, printing and publishing and brewing and distilling. The college was opened in 1964 in order to train the local population to work in these traditional industries. The city has seen significant increases in financial and business services, creative industries, communications, healthcare and retail and tourism. In the 1990s and early 2000s, there was substantial growth in the number of call centres based in the city, resulting in a greater

demand for information technology courses (as shown in Figure 3) with the college perfectly placed to deliver this type of training. Although much of the traditional industry has been gradually replaced by more diversified forms of economic activity, major manufacturing and heavy industry continues to be important to the area's economy.

As with College A, College C had developed from a recent merger of two existing colleges. The main campus of College C is situated in a town which was a centre of heavy industry during the industrial revolution and a major manufacturer of iron and steel in the 18th and 19th century. However, the last 50 years has seen much of this traditional industry decline. The economy of the town has become increasingly reliant on retail and tourism. This college was founded in 1963 from a merger of trade schools and the county mining institute. The college expanded in 1973 to provide further and adult education, further expanding in the 1980s to offer degree-level provision. The second college which merged to become College C was based in a town which had traditional weaving, glassmaking and brewing industries. As these main industries closed, the economy came to rely on retail and leisure.

5.2.2 The impact of college mergers

As mentioned above, Colleges A and C were formed by merging two pre-existing colleges. This process had a significant impact on the development of these colleges and is one of the main reasons why the culture of College A is so different from College B. The merger which led to the creation of College A was orchestrated between a large college (which itself was the result of several mergers and expansions), and a "smaller, more parochial college" (Executive Director, Hospitality, Sports and Tourism, College A). The merger was viewed by

the senior management of the college as an opportunity to increase the college's presence in the area:

> *The new college has been designed to maintain the strong links with the two towns and local communities while delivering the additional benefits that come from being part of a large college. We have an integral role to play… by supporting the changing needs of the local labour market and helping shape its future direction (Vice Principal, College A).*

The increased size of the new college in terms of student numbers, coupled with the increased geographical spread and catchment area, allowed the college management to aim to become a major player in providing a skilled workforce for not only the local economy, but also the national economy:

> *I see (the college) as having a key role externally within the Scottish sector…we are in a position to influence, contribute to and support the local economy (Executive Director, Creative Industries, College A).*

> *In terms of our national identity or national recognition, the college is now a significant size, in terms of turnover the largest in Scotland, so we are in a position to contribute nationally. In terms of the number of students we see we are probably approaching the largest in Scotland so that in itself is important (Vice Principal, College A).*

The members of senior management at College A believed that the merger was important as it allowed the college to increase its higher education provision through links with local universities:

> *It increased both the range of courses that we could deliver but it also increased the level of courses that we could deliver so that we could go all the way to offering honours degrees (Vice Principal, College A).*

Likewise, College C was formed from the merger of two pre-existing colleges, one of which was significantly larger than the other. The merger was viewed by senior members of staff as being of particular benefit to the smaller college, allowing it to expand and re-locate to a new site closer to the town centre and enjoy increased investment opportunities which it was not privy to before:

> *The college was not in a strong position financially and had wanted to move its campus for a while. By merging we were able to build a new campus which was much more suited to the kind of provision we wanted to offer (Associate Principal, College C).*

As a small college offering local provision, it had been experiencing financial difficulty which was seen as a common problem for colleges of a particular size. Thus, merging with a larger college made financial sense. The larger college was also motivated by expansion. In particular, the senior management of the larger college wished to persuade the SFC to underwrite the building of a new campus in an area targeted due to its lack of college provision:

> *Why would we merge with a small college that was struggling? We did that because our target was that we wished to build a college campus and we wanted to argue for strategic growth with the funding council and the new development was the carrot (Depute Principal, College C).*

The senior management at College C also stated that a key priority for the college was increasing its HE provision through links with local universities:

> *There is a lot more on offer in terms of going on to university and pursuing higher education than there was before. This is partly due to government targets and working with universities and so on but that is an area where we have made great advances in the last five or so years (Associate Principal, College C).*

As with College A, the senior management of College C had viewed the merger process as a way to increase their size and standing including offering increased access to HE in line with Scottish Government targets to improve overall skills levels in Scotland.

5.2.3 A stronger sense of academic values

At the time this research was conducted, the senior management of College B stated that the college had no aim to merge with another institution.

> *I think that the most important thing is that we focus on developing the college that we have now. We are in a relatively strong position and we are not looking to merge with another college (Assistant Principal, College B).*

However, with the college sector facing increased scrutiny in the wake of the Griggs Report, the board of management at College B announced on their website that they have agreed to begin exploratory merger discussions with another college:

> *This is a major period of change for the college sector in Scotland. Both colleges have developed a wide range of services and learning opportunities which meet the needs of learners and businesses, both large and small. We have been in joint projects that have resulted in positive outcomes. Both colleges will now proceed with further discussions to jointly plan the future for staff, learners and the communities we serve (Principal, College B, College B Website, 2012).*

When interviewed, the senior management of College B reported a stronger sense of the college's core academic values and its mission to provide a resource to the local community. This stronger sense of the college's mission may have been due to the fact that the college had not merged with another college in a bid to expand although this looks likely to be threatened by the latest round of merger.

The experience of undergoing a merger was disruptive to the established identities of the colleges. By expanding the size and scope of Colleges A and C, the focus on local community development was side-lined in favour of pursuing economic objectives such as increasing student enrolments, qualification levels and entering new markets. The senior

management of College B appeared to have a stronger sense of its academic values due to a more linear historical development. However, it is clear that future developments mean that it is likely no college will be immune to the merger process which could result in further loss of community focus.

5.2.4 New campus developments

Post incorporation, the colleges needed to invest in their campuses in order to compete for student numbers. Many college buildings were seen as out of date and badly in need of refurbishment. All three of the colleges had spent significant sums improving their physical environment in order to attract new students. As a consequence, the appearance of the colleges had changed since incorporation. As the landscape of the labour market changed to accommodate the new 'knowledge economy' and required less traditional industry, many workshops became out of date or obsolete. College A was building a new £17.5 million institute for engineering, construction, renewables and science. This new building would increase the number of students able to study at that campus from around 850 to 1500 and increase the number of staff based at the campus by almost 40 per cent to around 350 (Promotional Material, College A, 2009). This redevelopment was intended to further increase the college's range of provision, expanding degree-level courses:

> *By offering more range of provision we are opening up avenues for progression to university. These areas are something which is very big on the national agenda and allows us to further increase our standing in Scotland and beyond (Executive Director, Hospitality, Sports and Tourism, College A).*

The new facilities were designed to attract learners from all over the world, reflecting the college's desire to become the largest and most recognised in Scotland. Likewise, the new developments at College C were viewed by the senior management as a way to create and maintain a dominant presence across the region and promote the college internationally:

> *Many students travel halfway around the world to study at (College C) because of its state-of-the-art facilities like the process training plant which prepares you for any eventuality in the world of work (Website, College C, 2010).*

By contrast, the re-development of College B's main campus was aimed at providing a modern setting for the established curriculum rather than expanding the provision:

> *In terms of the new building, I think it now doesn't detract from what we did, it complements what we did, and it will likely inspire us (Principal, College B).*

This quote demonstrates the on-going sense of tradition of continuity at College B. In a direct contrast with Colleges A and C, the new campus developments were not designed to detract from the teaching and learning taking place within but rather to complement the strong core values of the college. The new campus developments at Colleges A and C were promoted in such a way as to distract from core teaching and learning and draw potential students' attention to the facilities in a bid to attract greater numbers of students. Rather than increasing the geographical spread of the college, the new developments at College B were designed to provide one central location, functioning as a focal point for the community. Colleges A and C had the monopoly over their local areas due to their size and visibility and did not have to compete for students to the same extent as College B. In contrast, the senior management at

College B viewed the new campus as a source of pride which could give them a competitive advantage in a crowded marketplace.

5.3 Branding and marketing

5.3.1 The importance of a brand name

As discussed in Chapter 1, colleges have been encouraged to see themselves and their courses as commodities to be marketed to students rather than focusing on their core academic missions. Prior to finalising their separate mergers, the senior management of Colleges A and C had to decide on new names for the resulting colleges. The senior management of College A in particular, recognised the pivotal role that a carefully selected brand name could play and adopted the language of branding without hesitation:

> *I think the name is of vital importance, our name is a stroke of genius because it carries that weight and that is what a good brand should do (Executive Director, Creative Industries, College A).*

Whilst the senior management of College C chose to name the college after the geographical area in which the college was located (as was the tradition with many colleges including College B), the management at College A decided that the college should be named after a historical figure who was a strong proponent of the free market. Senior managers at College A believed that branding the college in this way would enhance its local and national reputation present the college as innovative and underline the core values guiding its future development:

I think first of all it has got an international status and there are people throughout the world who know him, what he stood for and what his work was and I think that what he stood for and what his work was about gave us a very sound basis to develop a college around (Executive Director, Creative Industries, College A)

I think that our image, the whole brand name captures what we are about and our brand is based on innovation and quality (Executive Director, Education and Care Studies, College A).

The view of the senior management was that the name of the college would carry weight as opposed to the history of the college. It was interesting to note that the management of College A acknowledged that although the name might not be recognisable to the local community, it carries brand recognition internationally:

Internationally I think it is important. I think across a wider area the name carries weight rather than locally where I don't think it makes a great deal of difference (Executive Director, Engineering, Construction and Science, College A).

This individual's name was a highly significant factor in establishing the institutional ethos of College A. By aligning itself with a proponent of the free market, the college management placed a significant emphasis on the economic value of learning at college. College A was presenting itself as the avenue for future economic prosperity. College C, by comparison, chose a name which reflected the geographical area, reflecting its principal aims of expansion:

The merger allows us to work in a much wider geographical area and having the one symbol that we work under really helps people to know exactly who the college is. In a nutshell our main strategy is the new estates (Associate Principal, College C).

In contrast to College A, the brand names of Colleges B and C were chosen to evoke a sense of community ownership and brand loyalty amongst the local community. Promoting the local area and identifying the college as a resource for the surrounding community.

5.3.2 Marketing College A

In the past, colleges in Scotland have traditionally relied on open days and prospectuses as their main marketing channels. As discussed in Chapter 1, this has expanded post-incorporation to include an increased on-line presence, a greater spend on advertising across a range of channels and an overall more professional approach to marketing which targets specific groups. The college brand is promoted in such a way so as to differentiate the college from the local competition. Building a brand identity requires co-ordinated branding communication efforts.

College A's marketing efforts are very much driven by the management's desire to present the college as an institution which appeals to young learners. When browsing the College A website, the first impression is one of bright colours, presenting images of very young learners, summer sports clubs and children finger-painting. The senior management stated that they were keen for the learners' voice to drive the promotional material and for it to appeal to young learners:

The whole profile of the marketing campaign I think is brilliant, we use the students to make sure it's hip and trendy and appeals to the market (Executive Director, Hospitality, Sports and Tourism, College A).

As a result, the language used on the college website reads more like a hotel or a Club18-30 holiday brochure than a college of further education, demonstrating a considerable mission drift:

Whether you're looking to get pampered at one of our professional salons, treat yourself to a tasty meal prepared by our students and award winning chefs, or get yourself fit at the gym, we can deliver! (Website, College A, 2011).

Let (College A) Help You Get Beach Ready! Are you ready for summer? Are your feet ready for summer sandals? Are you feeling a bit pasty for your bikini or do you fancy getting a new hairstyle for the season? If so, students from our Hair and Beauty Department are on hand to help you get beach ready! (Website, College A, 2012).

Summer Fun at (College A)! Keep your kids entertained this summer with our popular kids club (Website, College A, 2012).

The provision at College A is promoted as a commodity. It was also clear that the college desires to pursue additional sources of revenue. Beauty salons, places to eat, and sports facilities all come with a price list aimed at promoting the college as not only a place to learn and gain qualifications but a place to spend leisure time.

The name of the college was used throughout the promotional material, driving the student testimonials and was used as the main theme of the 2009/10 prospectus. The student testimonials displayed throughout the prospectus begin with the line "I'm (College A)" for both male and female students. This presented the students as an extension and personification of the college. The promotional material projected the image of a college dominated by young learners. The majority of images used in the prospectus were of young learners who appeared to be in their late teens or early twenties. More importantly, all of the people in the prospectus and on the college website are white. Despite claims from senior management that the college was an international centre for learning, the promotional material featured a noticeable lack of different skin colours. In the prospectus, Black and Asian students were confined to the international section. The college website also regularly refers to the college's size and standing:

> *College A is the third largest college in Scotland and an international leader in the development of high quality further and higher education practices. We offer first class facilities, learning environments, support services and a wide range of internationally recognised certificated courses, making it the ideal place for you to study (Website, College A, 2010).*

The college website was regularly updated with news stories promoting the college's international links with countries such as Bulgaria and Turkey. Visits by staff from colleges in Malawi, Spain, Italy and Germany were presented alongside descriptions of the principal's international work:

> *He also played a leading role in the development of Scotland's Colleges International.... is Past President of the Post-secondary International Network (PIN). This is an international post-school network which brings together colleges, polytechnics and similar institutions from the USA, Canada, Fiji, UK, Bahrain, Australia and New Zealand. PIN members are either Presidents/Principals or Chairs of Boards of these institutions (Website, College A, 2010).*

The discourse of the marketing material placed a distinct emphasis on 'progression', 'qualifications' and 'pathways', further emphasising the college's links with universities:

> *Greater degree provision will enable more people to study degree level courses across more subject areas in (the region), providing individuals with improved skills and greater employment opportunities (Principal, Prospectus 2009/10, College A).*

College A's marketing focuses on high academic achievement and international expansion. The college chancellor was also a very high profile figure from the local area who had worked in the area of economics and the college management were keen that the college should use this link to its advantage. The college prospectus also featured several local celebrities. It was believed that recognisable names would afford the college more media coverage:

> *Working with these names gets us much more media coverage whereas previously we had to fight for that publicity (Executive Director Hospitality Sports and Tourism, College A).*

It was clear that College A was striving to appeal to a young demographic. The college was keen to promote itself as an international learning institution. However, it was noticeable that the marketing material was dominated by young, white students. By promoting itself and its courses as commodities, it was evident that the college marketing material was driven by a business model.

5.3.3 Marketing College B

By contrast, College B's marketing material focused on supporting the local community, positioning the college as a local resource. The cover of the 2008/09 prospectus contained the phrase "help and support, every step of the way", and also contained large sections devoted to providing guidance and support to learners. The student testimonials, in contrast to those of College A, began with the phrase "supporting you", further emphasising the college's desired image. As discussed earlier, the college had recently built a new main campus and the senior management felt that this was an opportunity to refresh the publicity material. The old logo, which had been in use from 1990, was also felt to be in need of updating:

> *The old logo was tired and out-dated. The new logo was unveiled in order to match the new and fresh challenges that are out there (Learner Services Manager, College B).*

This quote demonstrates that the senior management at College B realised they had to pay attention to the college's marketing strategy. Whereas the staff at College A needed little encouragement to adopt a marketing spin, the senior management at College B were more reluctant marketers.

It was reported that some members of staff were not initially convinced that changing the college's logo would achieve anything but stated that they had been surprised by how effective a new logo and branding could be:

> *It is much more modern and appeals to students, the old logo was so boring that I didn't even notice it. I didn't think it was important at all but I have done a complete U-turn. It is important that students can identify with it (Associate Principal, College B).*

College B's promotional material frequently featured references to the local community:

> *The college has strong links with the local community and with employers and community organisations across the city (Prospectus 2008/09, College B).*

> *The college serves a diverse range of communities and works closely with community organisations, both formally and informally...and provides over 100 community-based adult learning programmes in conjunction with Community Learning and Development (Prospectus 2008/09, College B).*

The prospectus featured a section on working with community partners and the college contains a School of Social and Community Studies. The first image on the college home page included the phrase:

> *The best in the west: 96% of our students would recommend (College B) to their friends, according to a recent learner survey (Website, College B, 2011).*

By referring to word-of-mouth as a promotional tool, the marketing of College B placed a greater emphasis on social capital. The marketing material contained images of a wide range of ages (as opposed to the young faces of College A's promotional material). What was also striking about College B's promotional material was the degree of ethnic diversity on show. Many of the images contained Black or Asian students, reflecting the city centre location and the make-up of the surrounding community. The website also promoted the college's work with adult learners:

> *College B provides community based adult learning programmes in conjunction with Community Learning and Development, many of which are delivered in centres and local halls across (the city) (Website, College B).*

The language used demonstrated College B's approach to lifelong learning, using a discourse where lifelong learning was presented as a journey to be experienced at all stages in life and for all members of society.

The marketing material of College B focused more on working with the local community and community development. The images in the promotional material contained a variety of skin colours which reflected the local community. The student union representative was also a more visible presence in College B's marketing and there was more mention of the social aspects of student life.

5.3.4 Marketing College C

College C's promotional material was driven by its future plans for expansion. The prospectus contained sections on 'Investing for the future and expansion', reflecting the strategic priorities of the college management:

> *We have put money into chemical engineering, process technology, we have a rig outside, we have a unique partnership with the local petro-chemical industry for their modern apprenticeship roots, so we have moved on but the strategy has always been science and engineering, a good strong progression, and because we are capped, there has to be employability options for everybody that comes through (Depute Principal, College C).*

The college's links with the nearby petro-chemical industry were immediately evident from images used on the website and throughout the prospectus. These images portrayed students wearing hard hats and working in laboratories. Close employment links were evident with recruitment advertisement for local companies prominently displayed on the college's home page. Again, the student voice was used throughout the marketing. However, where College C differed was in its use of video clips to demonstrate the college's work with local employers:

> *I'm really looking forward to coming to the new college, it will definitely be good for me with the tutors and the top of the range stuff so I'm really excited (Apprentice Stone Mason, Website 2011, College C).*

The website was also used to promote the college's new estates. A video promoting the new campus showed many people (including former Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning Fiona Hyslop) wearing hard hats as they were being given a tour of the new building. Although the hard hats were required due to the building work taking place, they further promote the college as one which has close links with industry. Another promotional video described the college campuses as geared towards specialised areas, for instance science and engineering, promoting these facilities as unique in Scottish further education. Links to the local economy were stressed as extremely important:

> *It's always important to anticipate where the economic growth is coming in the future. Tourism, food and drink and heritage tourism are important parts of Scotland's economy...providing the lifeblood for the local economy in the years to come (Fiona Hyslop, Website 2011, College C).*

The college vision was focused on delivering a service to local employers. The language used described 'the lifelong learning journey', highlighting the links with local universities. The college's main objectives with regards to their corporate plan were to meet the needs of learners and stakeholders and ensure that their new estates project contained provision that was relevant to the demands of the area. The new estates scheme was seen as vital to the future of the college and contained areas of new provision such as courses related to the rural area and more hospitality and arts which linked to the local university.

The images of the students used in College C's promotional material aimed to portray a mix of ages and ethnicities. The language used promoted the colleges as a suitable place for people in all stages of life:

> *At the College, we provide all-round, flexible education and training opportunities specifically designed to help individuals discover their potential at a time and pace suitable to their lifestyle and commitments (Website 2011, College C).*

However, the senior management admitted that the majority of the marketing was aimed at attracting young learners who traditionally take more of an interest in all aspects of student life:

> *We want to create more of a university feel, we've updated the student union and we put on a lot of activities for our younger learners, that's something universities have been very successful in doing and we would like to replicate that (Depute Principal, College C).*

The marketing material of College C was clearly focused on providing flexible provision and employability. The links with local industry were also clearly evident and promoted through a range of media.

All three of the colleges have had to engage in marketing activities in order to attract greater numbers of students and achieve financial performance indicators. However, it was clear that there was a direct contrast between the readiness of senior management at Colleges A and C to adopt marketing strategies and the reluctance of staff at College B to engage in aggressive marketing. Whereas the marketing campaign of College A was clearly targeted at young learners, offering additional services and presenting the image of a holiday brochure, the images and language used in the promotional material of Colleges B and C were aimed at

attracting a wider range of learners in terms of age and ethnicity. The marketing material of College B in particular, was clearly focused on presenting the college as a community resource, prioritising social inclusion and widening access. College C, on the other hand was keen to promote its links with local business and industry. The college is marketed to students as a direct route to employment. Overall, it was clear that the identities of the colleges were influenced by their focus on certain areas of government policy. The next section will examine how the senior management of the three colleges reconciled the colleges' institutional mission and culture with Scottish Government policy.

5.4 Senior staff perceptions of Scottish Government policy

It was clear that Scottish Government policy provided a background for much of the work at the three colleges. However, although all of the senior managers reported that they were supportive of government policy, it was clear that each of the three colleges prioritised different elements of lifelong learning policy such as the skills agenda, increasing employability, widening access and increasing links with schools and universities.

5.4.1 Adhering to the government's skills agenda

Engaging in lifelong learning at College A was presented in terms of the economic benefits it could bring to the individual and the opportunity it offered for learners to progress to higher education. The senior management expressed the belief that individuals chose to engage in learning in order to invest in human capital through increased knowledge and skills and improve their position in the labour market. This illustrated Ball's view that education has become increasingly viewed in terms of its economic value and contribution to market

competitiveness (Ball, 2007). The senior management of College A clearly valued the college's increasing influence on the local labour market:

> *I see (the college) as having a key role externally within the Scottish sector…we are in a position to influence, contribute to and support the local economy (Executive Director, Creative Industries, College A).*

As discussed in Chapter 2, Scottish Government policy has equated lifelong learning with the accumulation of human capital and increased levels of employment. It has also emphasised the importance of the college sector's role in providing people with the necessary skills to secure employment. As such, the senior management of College A believed that a key requirement of courses was that they were relevant to the skills and competencies demanded by the labour market and recognised that any courses without vocational relevance were viewed by the Scottish Government as having little value and being less worthy of investment:

> *There is a real focus from the Scottish Government regarding skills development and we are here to deliver that. The skills they learn here should transfer to the world of work (Executive Director, Sports, Tourism and Community Learning, College A).*

The senior management at College A were very supportive of the Scottish Government and the Skills Strategy:

> *Over the past couple of years it became quite clear that there was a significant challenge in terms of the population of Scotland having the skills to meet the*

economic driver which is being taken forward. I think that the driver for economic upturn will have to come from the population making sure that they have the skills sets required (Vice Principal, College A).

Developing skills was viewed as something which should be placed in the hands of the individual, it being their responsibility to equip themselves with the skills necessary to compete in the labour market.

5.4.2 The importance of transferable skills and addressing unemployment

As with College A, the senior management of College B were aware that there was a strong message from the Scottish Government for colleges to equip learners with skills that related directly to employment. However, the colleges differed with regards to their implementation of this objective. The management of College B stated that the college needed to provide its learners with transferable skills which would allow them to move between careers over the course of their working life. The management believed that individuals were not set on one career path that would serve them their whole life and were aware that the college had a responsibility to offer flexible provision which met the requirements of the labour market:

I think again it is about us looking to our employers, to the market out there, to be future-proofing, looking at what industries people are going to be working in, how we are going to support the numbers of people looking at 2nd or 3rd careers because of the current climate (Assistant Principal, College B).

Written in co-ordination with the Scottish Government's strategic priorities and the Scottish Funding Council's new corporate plan, College B's strategic plan addressed the level of high unemployment in the area. The priority for the senior management of College B was in tackling unemployment by equipping individuals with skills and widening access to non-traditional groups of learners at all levels of provision:

> *We are very good at widening access here and we work with the local community to make sure our strategies are effective. It has always been a big thing for us and it will continue to be our main priority....We cannot write a strategic plan in isolation of (policy), our mission and vision for widening participation and access are very much in line with the Scottish Government's (Principal, College B).*

College B emphasised the importance of widening access in its mission and vision and this was clearly a priority for the college. Widening access to educational provision was viewed as the best way for the college to contribute to employment in the local area and was viewed as "more than just bums on seats in order to achieve funding targets" (Assistant Principal, Business Development and Learner Services, College B). The senior members of staff at College B stated that the demand for skills was driven by local employers and they felt that the college recognised the importance of local labour markets to the development of the college curriculum. In order to facilitate an easy transition from community provision to mainstream courses, College B had opened up the lowest end of its provision:

> *They would start off maybe in a community course and then maybe an NC course and then onto an HNC or degree course or they would come here and go to university. I*

would say that our provision is access-driven. The exit points are clear, there is progression or exit for the individual (Principal, College B).

The college had worked to make progression routes clearer and provide courses which reduced the barriers of lack of confidence and insecurity which many adults faced when contemplating a return to learning. The college ran a skills development group entitled 'Routes to Learning' which was aimed at people who wished to enter the college but did not possess the core skills or confidence to access mainstream courses. The Routes to Learning group aimed to provide learners with the core skills that would help them access mainstream provision and at the end of the course all of the learners were linked with a 'routes to learning' advisor who could support their progression. It also served as a means to promote social skills and confidence amongst learners who may have had a negative experience of education in the past.

5.4.3 Progression routes to higher education

College C was situated very much in-between Colleges A and B in terms of offering clear progression routes to higher education and in terms of offering support to the local community. Although it was clear that the strategic priorities of College C were to expand and develop new provision, the senior management stressed the importance of increasing access and progression in order to re-skill adult learners. The senior management at College C pointed out that the college had a separate Department of Access and Progression which dealt with many students who had additional support requirements and offered a range of programmes which enabled these learners to enter the college with the aim that they would be integrated into the full time curriculum if they were deemed able.

> *From the government's point of view, they expect us to get people into education in order to tackle unemployment. It's one thing being able to get them onto a course but we need to have that progression there so that they can move through the college and come out the other side with a valuable qualification (Associate Principal, College C).*

However, it was noted that some courses offered in community outreach centres may have been used for social purposes such as the 'silver surfers' programme for older learners. These elements were not seen as part of the college's overall progression strategy and required to be "reined in" (Depute Principal, College C). It was felt that sometimes people would join groups to simply meet up and socialise:

> *There is a potential of them forming clubs, we inherited quite a number of these with (the smaller college) where there had been computing clubs and they had been doing all sorts of things but using it as a social. We don't do that anymore, if you want we will help you set that club up and then you can rent the accommodation back from us but this is about education, progression (Depute Principal, College C).*

The college had worked to make sure that every community class that they offered had an identified progression route so that people who came to the class knew that at the end they could go on to something else. The Scottish Government emphasised the importance of clear progression routes through the college and onto either employment or further study and the college was keen to adhere to this aim. College C had a higher percentage of student enrolments on additional learning support (11 per cent for FE and 8 per cent for HE) than

Scotland as a whole (10 per cent for FE and 4 per cent for HE). However, this was less than the percentage of student enrolments on FE on additional learning support at College B (21 per cent) (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010). This department also did a lot of work with adult returners and the college had made a deliberate move to situate this department in the centre of the college campus so that the learners felt that they were a part of the college. One of the main objectives of the college was to make sure that it met the needs of its learners and its stakeholders with a big emphasis on commercial activity such as working with local businesses. The college's business unit worked with construction, engineering and science and technology employers in the area to develop programmes for their employees and train modern apprentices for the nearby petro-chemical industry:

> *We will run courses for employers and obviously some employers carry more weight than others. The local petro-chemical plant is one example and they are very supportive of the college (Depute Principal, College C).*

5.5 Widening access and working with the local community

Widening access was a core objective for all three of the colleges. However, the senior management approached widening access with different agendas. The strong emphasis from the Scottish Government is that widening access is about getting people into work in order to increase the country's economic productivity. Working with particular disadvantaged groups was driven by funding mechanisms from the SFC. Particular groups of learners are presented as target groups and the colleges receive allocated funds to include learners from these groups. If they do not meet the SFC targets, however, this funding can be 'clawed back' by the SFC.

Policy from the Scottish Government promotes lifelong learning as the means to increase employment with a strong focus on the economic benefits of college learning. As noted in Chapter 2, the relationship between human and social capital is one of tension. This section will look at how the tensions between economic and social objectives are manifested through the opinions of the senior management and how these are approached differently in the three colleges. In particular, the tensions which exist in terms of widening access to non-traditional groups of learners and the different approaches to working with the local community are examined.

5.5.1 Approaches to widening access at College A

Despite the general endorsement of Scottish Government policy on the role of colleges in the development of human capital and economic growth, some members of the senior management team at College A (who were previously employed by the smaller college prior to merger) raised some doubts about the college's approach to widening access. These staff members felt that there was a risk that, in its pursuit of larger markets, the newly-formed College A would focus less on its local community and more on the recruitment of international students paying full fees. By prioritising economic objectives, the fundamental ethos of College A might be in tension with its other strategic objectives of widening participation. However, this was a minority view. The majority of senior management at College A were very supportive of the Scottish Government's strategic priorities with a strong focus on economics and generating further revenue through increasing student enrolments:

> *There are more and more pressures on colleges now in terms of sustainability and the funding for some courses has been cut and the need to generate further income streams is a definite pressure. By increasing our size we are able to take on more numbers of students and in terms of that we are now the largest in Scotland I think so that is something that we have been working very hard on doing (Executive Director, Hospitality, Sports and Tourism, College A).*

There was also a more general concern that, post-incorporation; the different boards of individual colleges in Scotland would be pushing in completely different directions in order to suit their own interests. However, the collective feeling amongst the senior staff at College A was that the SFC had managed to keep colleges pushing in the same direction by providing financial incentives to work with marginalised groups. The SFC provided the college with more attractive funding opportunities for dealing with learners at the lowest levels of provision. Through the SFC's unit of measurement for student activity, more funding was made available for disadvantaged students and the management stated that the main issue for the colleges was identifying and making use of that extra funding:

> *I think, if it was a bog-standard level of funding, then there might be a temptation to maybe take the easier options of merely targeting learners who will have a more productive time at college, but the funding isn't structured like that (Executive Director, Business, Management and Computing, College A).*

It was clear that the senior management of College A were influenced by funding targets from the SFC. Given the choice they would prefer to focus on easier to reach groups but would then miss out on funding. By making more money available for provision for groups

such as More Choices, More Chances, the Scottish Government was able to influence the SFC to ensure that colleges target these groups. The student unit of measurement (SUM) changes according to the priority placed on the subjects and target groups allowing colleges to devote more time and resources to marginalised groups. College A stated in its Admissions Policy that it had an absolute commitment to widening participation in lifelong learning, taking responsibility for helping individuals engage in learning. Admission to the college was "open to all applicants, regardless of age, disability, ethnic origin, gender, marital status, medical condition, religious belief or sexual orientation" (Admissions Policy, 2008, College A). The number of students with a disclosed disability for the year 2008-09 was 10.9 per cent. This was in line with the percentage of disabled students in Scotland's colleges overall and was higher than the proportion of disabled people in the 16-35 Scottish population (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010). The management at College A stated that admissions procedures were designed to ensure maximum access and the college had targeted students from socially and economically deprived backgrounds in its corporate plan in an attempt to increase the number of students that come from these groups:

> *We measure what our college profile looks like and we can look at the postcode data and see what percentage come from these areas. I have said I want to see a year on year increase but there are also various European projects that are specifically about reaching these hard to reach groups (Vice Principal, College A).*

However, despite drawing attention to its inclusion policies, the percentage of students at College A which required additional learning support for the year 2008-09 was only 4 per cent for further education courses and 2 per cent for higher education courses. These students differed from the disabled students referred to above because their impairments could be

more severe and would require significant adjustments to be made. They would often be taught in special or extension programmes, rather than participating in mainstream provision. This percentage was low in comparison to the overall statistics for Scotland's colleges which reported 10 per cent of student enrolments for further education on additional learning support and 4 per cent of higher education enrolments. The percentage of students from the top 25 per cent deprived areas at College A was also lower than the national average with 21 per cent of students enrolled in FE and 17 per cent enrolled on HE courses at College A residing in deprived areas as opposed to 25 per cent on HE and 22 per cent in Scotland overall (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010). The college management were aware that there were pressures from the Scottish Government to prioritise equipping people with 'the skills, expertise and knowledge for success' whilst also adhering to social inclusion agendas but it was clear that the skills agenda was the main priority for the college (Scottish Government, 2007a, p 2). The senior management of College A admitted that the focus on skills coming from the Scottish Government influenced the work of the college:

> *We are advised by, but not led by, the government. I think there is a respect there that says we know what the agenda is and we know what to anticipate. They say that they want us to respond to the skills agenda and we follow that advice (Vice Principal, College A).*

The senior management at College A viewed widening access in terms of funding targets and economic objectives. Their main objective was to develop higher level skills by opening up progression routes to higher education. Staff members at College A highlighted the difficulty in keeping up with policy changes:

It is difficult when you are told one thing and then a few years later there is a shift to perceiving learning in different terms but I think that's what the college sector is all about, adapting (Executive Director, Sports, Tourism and Community Learning, College A).

This proved to be a real strain for the senior management of the college who felt that they were expected to deal with problems concerning social inclusion as well as supporting the Scottish economy with dwindling resources.

5.5.2 Approaches to widening access at College B

The senior management at College B viewed widening access to harder to reach groups very differently:

Widening access to those who might not think they can come to college is really our bread and butter stuff. That is what we are here for and I would see opening up access at the lowest level as our main priority (Assistant Principal, Learner Development and Human Resources, College B).

Helping the city's poorest communities was viewed as the main priority for College B. Students who were registered unemployed or economically inactive accounted for 33 per cent of students at College B in 2008/09, a much higher proportion than that of College A (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010). The college management felt that it was their responsibility to break down the barriers to participation that many individuals from more deprived areas encountered when making the decision to return to learning. In an attempt to increase the

number of access points for the community, College B managed a local learning resource centre and a community learning centre. It also provided over 100 community-based adult learning programmes in partnership with the city council's Community Learning and Development scheme. Community regeneration was viewed as an important part of the college's work due to its proximity to areas of high deprivation and unemployment where the population was poorer than the average population in Scotland, and more culturally diverse. The principal of the college sat on the Ethnic Minority Enterprise Board and was involved with projects helping asylum seekers and refugees gain places at college. If these learners already had existing qualifications, the college would help them plan their routes into employment. The college was clearly successful in attracting students from minority ethnic backgrounds with 14.6 per cent of students stating their ethnic background as other than white in the year 2008-09, which far exceeded the 4.9 per cent of all students in Scotland's colleges and the 2 per cent of the population recorded in the 2001 census. The senior management at College B were aware that the value which the local community placed on formal education could either nurture or erode individuals' motivations to participate at college. The management at College B were of the opinion that the college had a responsibility to work to change negative perceptions of learning so that it could fulfil its role as a source for urban regeneration and social change. If negative perceptions existed surrounding formal learning then the management believed that the college should attempt to promote lifelong learning as a positive pursuit to which all are entitled.

The senior management at College B reported that partnerships with community organisations had allowed the college to run formal and informal community groups and community-based adult learning courses where the college staff would go out into the community and deliver courses in order to try and get people back into education. In the case

of formal programmes, the students would come into the college at the end of their course for their graduation so that they were aware that they were a valued part of the overall college community. Funding from the European Structural Funds (ESF) was used to target disadvantaged groups such as the long-term unemployed and ethnic minorities. The college monitored equality levels through money from the European Structural Fund to make sure that the student population represented a breadth of the population. As with College A, the vast majority of learners at College B lived within the local area with 74 per cent of learners living within the city. However, the local population was very diverse in terms of ethnicity due to the high proportion of asylum seekers and immigrants housed in the local area. College B was situated in a city which had the highest proportion of people living in deprivation in Scotland. However, this area also had the highest number of students participating in college programmes from these deprived areas. In 2008-09, over 3,000 students who participated at College B resided within the 25 per cent most deprived areas in Scotland, accounting for over 50 per cent of student enrolments in FE and 35 per cent of enrolments in HE. This was far greater than the 25 per cent of FE and 22 per cent of HE enrolments in Scotland's colleges as a whole (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010). Students who lived within deprived areas also had the highest rates of participation and hours of learning per student over the last 10 years. It is important to take hours studied per head as well as participation rates into account as an area may have a high participation rate but small amounts of activity per head of the population (SFC, 2007a). College B stated in its strategic plan that:

> *We will continue to ensure access to provision via community-based learning to some of (the city's) poorest communities….it is crucial that we maintain and build on our*

commitment to be an inclusive and outward looking institution that welcomes and supports learners from all communities (Strategic Plan 2007-2010, College B).

This strategic plan was clearly focused on addressing social deprivation through education, addressing social inclusion and the local community. It was clear that the senior management viewed widening access very differently to the senior management at College A.

5.5.3 Approaches to widening access at College C

As mentioned before, College C was situated geographically, and in terms of its mission and identity, very much in-between Colleges A and B. According to senior members of college C staff, access-level provision was an overwhelmingly positive part of the college, allowing learners to enter college and take part in programmes which gave them the opportunity to progress onto courses that they would not have been able to access previously. The college provided access-level provision in the form of 'New Start' courses for learners who may have been disillusioned by educational experiences in the past. The senior management at College C believed these courses worked well as they allowed people to have a 'taster' session of subjects across a department so that they did a core year and then they could move on to their preferred area once this initial year was completed. The New Start programme was believed to have been particularly successful in bringing in young learners who may have been previously thought of as 'too challenging' for mainstream college provision. New Start courses were structured in such a way as to ensure progression on to mainstream courses if that path was deemed appropriate for the learner and it was clear that progression was the main priority for the senior management:

What we have done is made sure that every community class that we have, whether it is day time or evening, now has an identified progression route so if you are coming into the class you will know that at the end of that class you can go A, B or C (Associate Principal, College C).

Courses at College C were designed to ensure that learners were able to access higher levels of provision should they so wish:

The community programmes are difficult for us as they are not very sustainable for example if there are only three or four people coming to programmes or if they are out in the sticks. I think we will see over a period of time that that will be brought more in-house and people will be looking at more flexible approaches to that. What we want is them coming in to the college and progressing onto higher level studies, that is the aim (Depute Principal, College C).

The average percentage of students from the top 25 per cent most deprived areas in Scotland made up 20 per cent of all College C's students in the academic year 2008/09. This accounted for 17 per cent of FE and 14 per cent of HE activity which was far lower than the overall picture for Scotland (29 per cent of all FE activity and 23 per cent of all HE activity). The senior management acknowledged that the college did not work with many areas of social deprivation:

We don't have many areas of social deprivation in (the three main towns), although you could go and point to the areas and say this area etc. But in the postcode lottery

we don't have many. If you go to Glasgow then they have hundreds, so we don't get much additional funding for additional access (Depute Principal, College C).

However the senior managers did point to a recent development which had been deliberately situated in an area of high deprivation with the view to opening up access to that community:

The school has opened up a really good opportunity for the people that are left in this area because there's not that many people left there now, to access education right on their doorstep and they are doing that and because it is a kind of community school, the bistro is there, the hairdressing is there and people can actually access that as well so it seems to be really good. There are people from the community, particularly women, who were involved in the construction of that school (Associate Principal, College C).

This was an interesting example of the college balancing economic and social objectives by widening participation and progression to further areas of study whilst encouraging community participation and social inclusion. However, the senior management acknowledged that funding targets from The SFC did have an impact on which sort of groups were targeted by the college:

The MCMC group started becoming the flavour of the month and you actually looked into the portfolio we were actually meeting a lot of that already but they didn't have that label so we do a lot of work to try and target these groups because that's where the funding is (Associate Principal, College C).

I suppose there could be, however, if you are targeting the groups that you should be targeting and if you make sure that there are progression routes for people to come in then that is not an issue (Associate Principal, College C).

Despite the obvious influence of government funding targets and the need to provide progression routes to higher education, it was clear that the senior management at College C strived to maintain a balance between economic and social objectives in accordance with their mission and identity. At College C, community regeneration within local areas of deprivation was high on the senior management's agenda with representation at community access and single outcome agreement meetings. The college had worked with three local councils in the region in terms of community planning and had invested heavily in building campuses which were situated in areas which had no previous formal learning opportunities with the hope that if investment was put into these areas then they would improve. One campus, which was opened in 2008, housed the college's Department of Leisure Industries and was situated in a community with high levels of deprivation. It was hoped that the new development would help contribute to the regeneration of the area and function as a centre for civic participation in the community.

5.6 Conclusion

The chapter illustrates the way in which three colleges, differing in history, geographical location and culture, have attempted to preserve their individual identity whilst conforming to multiple pressures from the SFC and Scottish Government policies and priorities.

Colleges A and C had been created by merging large, ambitious institutions with smaller, more community-focused colleges, and in both cases it appeared that the ethos and culture of the larger institution predominated. In both Colleges A and C, the smaller colleges were forced to merge with the larger institutions in order to survive financially. This led to a feeling amongst some senior staff members that the larger colleges had taken over the smaller colleges with the new institutions adopting the ethos of the larger college at the expense of the community focus of the smaller college. In contrast, College B clearly stated that it was a community college with no desire to expand or reach out to new markets. The college presented itself as a local resource offering opportunities for social mobility and personal development through the acquisition of skills and competencies. By undergoing mergers, Colleges A and C had been able to expand and grow in order to achieve economic targets such as increasing student numbers and offering higher levels of provision. Further mergers in the sector look likely in the wake of the Griggs Review. However, it was evident that engaging in this process disrupted the established culture and identity of the colleges involved resulting in concerns over a loss of identity from some senior members of staff at Colleges A and C who felt that that priorities concerning social cohesion and community engagement may be lost in the pursuit of economic targets. Although College B may yet be involved in future mergers, at the time this research was conducted the lack of merger had allowed the college to stay consistent in terms of its academic values resulting in a stronger sense of identity amongst the senior management. Recent campus developments reinforced this strategy by centring the college in one location as opposed to the widespread coverage of Colleges A and C.

Marketing, promotion and branding have become increasingly important to colleges in efforts to attract greater numbers of students. Colleges have had to develop strategies which relate

the total organisation to its environment and provide a strategic direction to its activities. The increased level of marketing reflected this loss of focus, particularly at College A which was marketed like a young persons' holiday brochure, demonstrating considerable mission drift. The name of the college after it merged was chosen partly based on a belief that it would carry weight internationally. This name was also particularly indicative of the free market focus of the college, although this might not be recognised by members of the local community. The marketing material of the colleges promotes image rather than the college culture or identity and whereas senior members of staff at Colleges A and C were willing marketers who readily adopted the promotional campaigns of the colleges, the senior management at College B were more reluctant to accept the importance of marketing and brand image.

Lifelong learning at Colleges A and C was perceived in economic terms and strategic plans were influenced by a business-like approach to building new campuses and extending provision. Increased links with universities allowed the senior management to adhere to Scottish Government targets concerning skills levels. In contrast, lifelong learning at College B was perceived in terms of addressing unemployment, deprivation and social exclusion, reflecting the issues of its surrounding community. This reflects the great diversity between regions in terms of size and geography and reinforces the 'one size does not fit all' approach to future mergers discussed in Chapter 1.

This chapter has shown that there were distinct differences between the missions of the three colleges studied as well as the identity each college promoted through their marketing outputs. Each of the colleges had developed a unique identity in relation to its history,

geographical location and relationship with local communities. This also influenced the colleges' approach to mediating Scottish Government lifelong learning policy.

6. COLLEGE STAFF AND COLLEGE CULTURE

6.1 Introduction

The members of staff who work in Scotland's college sector play an important role in defining the culture of the institution through the mediation of official policy to students through their working practices. Previous research has shown that members of staff in further education colleges do not simply receive policy as docile vessels, rather:

> *They filter policies of reform and change through their existing professional ideologies and perspectives. This produces different strategies or adaptations in the teacher workforce that range from willing compliance with new policy to resistance and rejection (Shain and Gleeson, 1999, p 453).*

Changes in educational policy at government and institutional level, coupled with the increasing influence of marketization following incorporation, resulted in some college staff experiencing reductions in pay, job security, academic freedom and job satisfaction leading to what Shain and Gleeson describe as "an industrial relations battlefield" (1999, p 445). The tensions which exist between the economic and social agendas in Scottish Government policy are mediated in different ways through policy and practice in the three colleges.

Building on the findings in the previous chapter, this chapter explores what impact changes to Scottish Government policy on lifelong learning had on different members of staff in each of the three colleges. Drawing on interviews with heads of department, lecturers and student support staff, this chapter explores how members of staff at Scotland's colleges make sense

of government policy and the changing conditions of their work. The main sections this chapter will look at are: staff views of college mergers; college estates and staff identity; staff perceptions of government and college priorities; the impact of performance indicators on college staff; and staff attitudes to widening access. In doing so, it will explore the changing nature of college staff identity and help to understand contemporary educational change.

6.2 Staff views of college mergers

6.2.1 Potential problems with merging institutions

As discussed in the previous chapter, the recent mergers which led to the establishment of both Colleges A and C were highly significant in establishing the colleges' future direction. However, in contrast to the overwhelming support from the senior managers, tensions between the economic and social agendas in national policy manifest in the teaching staff's concerns over college mergers and the strategic priorities of the colleges. Members of teaching staff placed greater value on the wider non-economic benefits of engaging in lifelong learning, particularly staff who were previously employed by the smaller, more community-focused colleges prior to merger:

> *I think there is a greater focus on becoming larger and I don't necessarily think that is a good thing as it can sometimes result in a loss of community focus (Lecturer, Management, Marketing and Business, College A).*

> *I think it (the smaller college) was very much a community college and did a lot of community courses which didn't give qualifications. The old (larger) college was*

much more an FE college where you worked for qualifications (Head Of Teaching Department (HOTD), Leisure Industries, College C)

Staff members from Colleges A and C expressed concerns that the newly-merged colleges would prioritise increasing the colleges' size and standing, both nationally and internationally, at the expense of maintaining a close relationship with the local community and providing courses which promoted social interaction and civic activity:

There was always that worry, that the college will forget the local population. I don't think that is the case here but there is always that concern (Lecturer, Engineering, College A).

We are looking further afield now and I don't always think that's a good thing. We have to be careful that we don't forget to provide local skills for local people (HOTD Construction, College C).

Although this view was not expressed by every member of staff, it was a clear concern for many. In Colleges A and C, the collision of two different cultures led to some conflict between the strategic directions of the colleges and the members of staff who were previously in the employ of the smaller colleges feeling as though they were being taken over:

There's no doubt a lot of people from (smaller college) saw it as a takeover rather than a merger and some of them were dragged kicking and screaming into the new organisation (Department Head, Business, College C).

This inevitably led to some members of staff feeling a degree of resentment towards their new college and its strategic direction. This could have a damaging effect on the teaching and learning within. Post-merger, the ethos of the newly-formed College A was believed to have more in common with the previous larger college which led to further conflict and tension:

> *The core business was very much an extension of the (larger) college one and I didn't see much deviation from that and that did attract a wee bit of criticism at the time. Although it is seen as a merger the larger college's ethos was really the one we adopted and I think it lost a bit of the charm of (the smaller) college (Curriculum Head, Education and Care Studies, College A).*

6.2.2 Reasons for mergers

It was recognised that the smaller colleges were experiencing financial difficulties and that the mergers were necessary to ensure the survival of these institutions:

> *There is a cultural mind-set, both colleges had one… the (larger) college had much less of a community focus than the (smaller) college and also had much more ambition to become an international brand but it was something that had to be done for the (smaller) college's sake and I think this will be the norm for smaller colleges now (Lecturer, Business, College A).*

> *In a practical sense it was important that the colleges merged because it was not viable to have two colleges competing in the same area (Lecturer, Hairdressing, College C).*

By focusing on local provision and being unable to expand, the smaller colleges had struggled to survive financially. Merging with the larger colleges was seen as the "the only way for the (smaller college) to keep its head above the water" (HOTD, Engineering Construction and Science, College A). Where the smaller colleges were located, the collapse of traditional industries had meant that the traditional provision offered by the colleges was viewed as out-dated and lacking in demand. Conversely, although College B was located in an area which had seen a decline in industrial activity, it was able to continue to offer provision which was in demand from the local population without having to merge with another college:

> *I do know that the college has always been part of the community and it has always been a strong part of the community in terms of the fact that we are a community college, we are here for them so we are able to alter our provision very quickly to meet the needs of the local labour market (Senior Lecturer, Social and Community Studies, College B).*

6.2.3 The impact of mergers on job security of college staff

By not merging with another institution, College B had avoided many of the difficulties associated with bringing together two pre-existing institutions. One of these difficulties involved the inevitable loss of jobs. Although the senior management of Colleges A and C desired to increase the size of the new colleges, some job losses were unavoidable. Some members of staff who had came through the process with their position intact felt that the mergers had been managed very well:

We didn't hugely reduce staff because there was some natural, I was going to say wastage but I don't know if that's the best term, people were getting near retirement age (HOTD, Leisure Industries, College C).

This response was to be expected as those who failed to hold onto their positions were no longer at the college and unavailable for interview. Whether the staff members were previously employed by the larger or smaller college also had an effect on their view of the merger. Those who were previously employed by the larger colleges tended to have a more positive opinion, perhaps due to less of a disruption:

I think it was a fairly comfortable process, not many staff experienced problems (Lecturer, Engineering, College A)

I don't think there were any problems, I think the structure was well thought through and if you speak to other members of staff hopefully they will give you that answer as well. In terms of overall structural design there was some change for individuals but it wasn't about individuals, it was about what was right for the college (HOTD Construction, College C).

Contrast this with the views of staff who were previously employed by the smaller colleges:

Oh absolutely there were initial problems because both institutions had cultural mind-sets (Lecturer, Management, Marketing and Business, College A).

It was quite painful and I experienced part of that at the beginning but I think that if you really believe that what you are doing is right then things will come out. Obviously there were things that we could have done differently but we created a vision and that is a very positive thing (Lecturer, Tourism, College C).

The staff felt that future mergers in the college sector were inevitable:

There are so many employers who don't know where to go and what the qualifications are so I think the government would like less FE colleges and they would see (College A) as something they would like to do further…in 10 years time I think (a further two colleges) will be merged with ours and just have one big college (Department Manager, Hospitality and Tourism, College A).

The main focus is, let's merge them all together because they are costing us a lot of money (Curriculum Head, Special Programmes, College A).

Having come through a merger process with a largely positive outlook, many of the staff at College A welcomed further mergers in the college sector:

There was always a desire, pre-devolution to enhance the position of colleges. Post-incorporation, it is a bit difficult because of the boards pushing in different directions (Department Manager, Construction and Crafts, College A).

I think they (the Scottish Government) realised that there is saturation and that it could be delivered better in partnership. Colleges are all competing for the same

amount of students so it's better if we work together (Department Manager, Hospitality and Tourism, College A).

However, members of staff at College C were also of the opinion that not all policy can be applicable across the board:

The government may have to change their focus quite radically and maybe locally because the demands placed on a college in central Scotland will probably be totally different to one in Aberdeen or rural Scotland. If local industry collapses they are going to have to react to that at a local level. There will be funding constraints placed on them so they may have to rein stuff in (HOTD, Business, College C).

If the future is to hold more mergers for the college sector, as looks to be the case for College B, there is a risk that the tensions illustrated here could further manifest across the sector having a significant impact on the teaching and learning within.

6.3 College estates and staff identity

The economic discourse used in Scottish Government policy on lifelong learning assumes that colleges will constantly improve the quality of provision they offer. This includes updating the existing campus facilities as well as building new campus developments. All three of the colleges had recently invested in new campus buildings. However, the staff at each of the colleges viewed these new developments in different ways.

6.3.1 Rationale behind new developments

Staff members at College A were under the impression that the new developments were aligned with government priorities. Campuses had been built or re-developed in the hope of attracting international students to the college as well as developing the college brand and identity:

> *Our new campus developments are designed to appeal to learners from all over the world. We can offer world-class facilities which will attract extra numbers of students (Curriculum head, Special programmes, College A).*

The staff at College C also recognised the importance of increasing the college's size and profile. The staff members were aware that building a new campus in a previously untapped area was the main strategic priority for the college:

> *Our key priorities from my perspective is the new estates, the new campus builds, in a nutshell that's got to be our main strategy (Department Head, Creative Industries, College C).*

However, whilst many members of staff at College C understood why the college was increasing its size, many also stressed the importance of maintaining a relevance to the local community. New facilities had been built to train students to work in the local petro-chemical industry. Other new developments had been deliberately situated in areas of high deprivation, contributing to community development and helping learners to develop both their social and human capital:

I think this is important because (local area) has a new sense of community and a new identity now and it is not associated with the images of the past, they always say that if you improve people's environment then they will look after it. If a place is run-down then it is likely to become more so. If investment is put into the area then it will improve (Lecturer, Health Care, College C).

It was felt that new developments in areas which previously had very little or no access to provision could contribute to community regeneration and promote a feeling of association within the local area which might not have previously existed:

I think it re-generates the area economically, it gives people more ambitions to improve themselves and we are there to help them along the way (Head of Learning Resources, College C).

6.3.2 A central point for community activity

As described in the previous chapter, unlike Colleges A and C, which had multiple campuses across several locations, the senior management of College B were focused on having one main campus in the heart of the community. The staff members at College B stated that the reasoning behind this was "to become a central point for social and educational activity in the area" (Senior lecturer, Early education and childcare, College B). The recent campus development was a source of great excitement and pride amongst the members of staff interviewed. It was hoped that this sense of pride would also transfer to the students:

> *We will remain a community college but we will have a new sense of who we are and maybe have more focus with being in one location (HOTD, Hospitality, Sport and Creative Arts, College B).*

Staff members felt that rather than serving to promote the college internationally, it was important that the college should be a major source of community activity and shared endeavour, leading to higher levels of social capital:

> *By providing a new purpose-built campus the college can instil a sense of civic pride in the community with students proudly identifying themselves with the college (HOTD, Hospitality, Sports and Creative Arts, College B).*

The previous main college building was described as 'dilapidated and in quite a state' (HOTD, Design and Construction, College B). It was also hoped that a new campus building would also be a source of competitive advantage in a crowded marketplace:

> *It's important for us to have something over and above the other colleges in (the city). We are in a crowded marketplace and we need to make sure we are offering the best services and the best facilities (HOTD, Computing, College B).*

The different attitudes to recent college developments displayed by the college staff reflected the underlying ethos and priorities of the colleges. Colleges A and C had made it a priority to expand their campuses and extend their reach, further promoting their brand in the process. The members of staff interviewed were largely supportive of these priorities, perceiving them as the best way to increase student numbers. Staff members at College B on the other hand,

believed that the best way to provide lifelong learning opportunities was to focus on the local community, bringing the campus together to provide one focal point for the community.

6.3.3 Mergers and their effect on staff identity

The members of staff at Colleges A and C were concerned that the college sector was viewed as the poor cousin of universities.

> *I think before colleges were seen as the poor relative of universities and universities still probably see us as that but we are not a university but we can provide a very good service and be a feeder to university (Curriculum Head, Special Programmes, College A).*

Although some members of staff felt that the government valued the contribution of colleges, there remained that sense of being less recognised than universities:

> *I think the sector feels valued by the government which wasn't always the case as you would have been seen as second-class citizens compared to universities (HOTD, Business, College C).*

> *I think that FE, although we are now a college of further and higher education, has always been seen as that but in-between school and university. I won't call it a dumping ground but it's not compulsory education, and it's not higher education, and because it doesn't get the levels of funding that universities get it's sometimes seen as the poor relation (HOTD, Construction, College C).*

The less secure identity exhibited by staff at Colleges A and C could be due to recent mergers. Unlike the members of staff at Colleges A and C, who expressed concerns that colleges were still seen as second class to universities, the members of staff at College B were more confident that the college sector's role in society was secure and recognised:

> *There is a real place for colleges now and that is widely recognised. On top of employers, schools and universities, I think the government recognises that as well (HOTD, Hospitality, Sports and Creative arts, College B).*

> *I think their view has changed they are realising what the sector has done and what it can do (HOTD, Computing, College B).*

The strong sense of identity exhibited by members of staff at College B could be the result of a more established role in the local community and the lack of upheaval experienced by Colleges A and C in their recent mergers. Staff members at Colleges A and C were insecure about the position and status of the colleges in the wider post-16 landscape, believing them to be viewed as the poor relations of universities. However, staff from College B felt that the role of the college sector was more defined and felt that the sector was valued.

6.3.4 The role of the college lecturer

Many staff members stated that the type of learning and teaching in the colleges had changed dramatically in their time there. Respondents agreed that the formal courses had become more student-centred with a decrease in the traditional 'chalk and talk' lecturing approach

and an increase in more flexible, varied approaches. These new approaches had to be developed in order to cope with new groups of learners who were encouraged to enter the college through widening access initiatives but who did not wish to sit and be lectured to:

> *There is more of an emphasis on developing flexible learning rather than sitting the kids down and lecturing to them... widening access at the lower level gets the younger students in and let them see the college life and get into the way of doing the assessments and so on but many of them quickly get bored so we need to move with the times and change the way we teach (Department Head, Access and Progression, College C).*

The roles and responsibilities of some members of staff, particularly those in departments which taught manual, vocational subjects such as construction and engineering, had remained fairly static for many years and many were not ready to deal with this change to their role:

> *It is a bit of a pastoral role as well and for people who have been in education a long time they are maybe not equipped to deal with the changes to their jobs (Department Manager, Engineering, Construction and Science, College A).*

These members of staff tend to have joined the college from vocational backgrounds and have traditionally focused their role as one of training for industrial vocations rather than a more general academic education. This has resulted in a clash of cultures between members of staff who view their roles differently.

My role here is to teach them skills and to teach them a trade so that they can get work at the end of it. I've noticed in recent years that the role of a college lecturer is changing and that's ok in some other subjects but I don't think it works for us. We are used to dealing with the kids in a certain way (Lecturer, Fabrication and Welding, College B).

The responsibilities of a college lecturer have changed and we're no longer just here to teach manual skills. There's more of an emphasis on teaching social skills and encouraging the students to take an interest in learning. I know that not all of the staff are happy with this but it's a sign of the times (Lecturer, Business, College B).

There was a clear difference between the views of lecturers who taught manual, vocational subjects and those who taught more academic, classroom based subjects. As the quotes above illustrate, many lecturers who had previously worked in traditional industries found it difficult to adapt to the pastoral responsibilities expected of them, whereas those members of staff who pursued a more academic route to their current position found it easier to adapt.

6.4 Staff perceptions of government and college priorities

As seen in the previous chapter, the senior management of each of the three colleges placed varying degrees of priority and displayed diverse understanding of different areas of Scottish Government policy such as adhering to the skills agenda, increasing employability through engaging in lifelong learning and widening access to non-traditional groups of learners. The next section will explore staff perceptions of Scottish Government and college priorities in each of the three colleges in order to understand how these priorities are mediated.

6.4.1 Adopting the government's skills agenda

The teaching staff at College A were acutely aware of the Scottish Government's Skills Strategy and acknowledged that they were expected to offer greater levels of provision which focused on developing transferable skills directly related to the labour market and less on learning for learning's sake:

> *The key priorities I am led to believe is to contribute to economic development and I think it is to work in partnership with industry, commerce and government, local and national (Lecturer, Management, Marketing and Business, College A).*

> *There is a definite move for skills as opposed to just purely academic type courses for the sake of it. That is coming from the government and the college wants us to focus on that. It is important that the students earn the qualifications that help them move on to higher education or help them gain employment (Lecturer, Engineering, College A).*

The college was viewed as a place for qualifications and as a stepping stone to higher education as opposed to a social resource. The staff at College A stated that promoting the priorities of the college was a very important part of their role and were very supportive of Scottish Government priorities:

> *I think certainly that the college is much closer to some of the policies now and that we would help make that happen. The corporate plan which includes the strategic*

plan for the last, almost two years now has to a large extent drawn its direction from things like the government skills agenda which is a helpful document and it identifies the key skills areas. (Curriculum Head, Special Programmes, College A).

The priorities from the Scottish Government closely aligned with the priorities of College A. The staff members interviewed reflected the views of the senior management in readily accepting the economic priorities of both the college and the government.

Staff members at College C were also of the opinion that the main priority of the Scottish Government and the college was the Skills Strategy and were happy to accept this as part of their remit:

The Skills Strategy is clearly embedded in all our work and it is even more important given the current economic condition (HOTD, Care, Social sciences and Early Education, College C).

I think the Scottish Government sees colleges as having a key role in moving the Skills Strategy forward (Head of Learning Resources, College C).

Several members of staff at College C also mentioned that the government is looking for internationalisation. This was especially noticeable from staff in areas such as hairdressing which may not have previously been concerned with international markets:

We are expected to ensure that the criteria is being addressed for employability and citizenship and also being able to work in partnership with international markets as well, part of the global citizenship thing (Lecturer, Hairdressing, College C).

There is quite a big difference in the amount of international activity that we have here compared to when I first started (Lecturer, Care, College C).

However, some members of staff at College A were concerned that by focusing on developing higher end skills and internationalisation, those at the lower end of provision may suffer, although this was a minority view:

We want to get everyone into college because that reduces unemployment but we are too technical-like. We are an integral part of economic and social development, just as universities are but this might affect our goals regarding widening access so the marketing will need to respond to that (Curriculum Head, Special Programmes, College A).

These quotes demonstrate the demands placed upon the staff and the way they are pulled in multiple directions by being expected to deliver locally, nationally and internationally.

6.4.2 Contrasting priorities

In contrast to the willing adherence exhibited by staff members at Colleges A and C, the members of staff interviewed at College B appeared to have a far more cynical approach to Scottish government policy and politicians in general.

I don't know what their focus is, whether it is to get as much of Scotland's workforce as educated as possible or whether it is to massage the employment figures (Lecturer, Communications, College B).

It (the Scottish Government) talks about supporting us and I agree with a lot of the rhetoric but I have absolutely no time for politicians who have a short-term view on things. I think they are self-serving and they don't look at the big picture which is supporting the local community in order to achieve long-term growth rather than addressing certain areas because there is a shortage there at the moment (HOTD, Social and Community Studies, College B).

Government support was believed to be confined to financial support for new buildings rather than aligning with the strategic priorities of the college:

Well they have been supportive in terms of the new build process and in terms of renewing the fabric of the learning environments. I think they have invested in terms of capital but further than that I am not too sure (Senior Lecturer, Early Education and Childcare, College B).

However, the staff were very supportive of the college priorities which focused on widening access to non-traditional groups of students and tackling unemployment in the local area. The members of staff at College B believed that the priorities of the Scottish Government did not match up with the priorities of the college.

I don't feel that they (the Scottish Government) are fully in synch with what we are doing here. I think aims such as social inclusion and community go out the window when you are chasing numbers (Senior Lecturer, Health and Social Care, College B).

This resulted in a very negative attitude towards the Scottish Government from some members of staff. Staff at College B were also more reluctant to re-train and mentioned that changes from the Scottish Government presented difficulties with regards to re-training staff:

What if you had lots of staff in a business area or say we didn't need any more nurses, what would you do with the staff? You would need to diversify or have a long-term strategy on how you can re-train but what if the staff are not prepared to re-train? (Learner Services Manager, College B).

I think that staff expertise impacts upon what we offer as a college. We could offer lots more activity on some areas but there would be lots of redundancies and new recruitments so it's the staff base which impacts upon what we offer rather than the funding (HOTD, Hospitality, Sports and Creative Arts, College B).

When the economic priorities of the Scottish Government aligned with those of the college, as in the case of College A and C, the staff members were more willing to adopt that agenda. However, when these economic priorities conflicted with the wider non-economic priorities of staff members at College B, this resulted in a very negative view of the Scottish Government.

6.4.3 Increasing links with higher education

As discussed previously, the Scottish Government expects colleges to increase links with schools and higher education institutions in an effort to equip the nation with higher levels of skills. In addition to this, colleges are expected to have links with employers and local businesses and respond to the training needs of the local labour market. The views of the staff members on this issue was clearly influenced by the strategic priorities of the institution.

Staff members at Colleges A and C were aware that the senior management of the colleges were very keen to increase progression to higher education and the colleges had been working in partnership with local universities to ensure this goal was met:

> *We have worked very closely with (local university) so that we can offer degree-level provision. I know that is something the college board and the staff are very keen to expand and I see that as one of the main priorities for the college moving forward (Curriculum Head, Business, Management and Computing, College A).*

> *Links to university have certainly increased and we have an important role to play in opening up access to universities as well as offering degree-level provision (Head of Learning Resources, College C).*

The lecturers at Colleges A and C also reported that the content of the courses changed according to the requirements of higher education institutions.

It is important to keep the courses up to date and make sure we are in line with what is required from universities (Department Manager, Early Education and Childcare, College A)

It does influence what we offer because it is a major strategic move for us (offering degrees) (HOTD, Business, College C).

Increasing links with higher education students and offering increased levels of degree level provision was reported as a major priority for the senior management at Colleges A and C and it was clear that the staff interviewed at these colleges shared this view. The members of staff at College B, unlike those at Colleges A and C, did not see that it was their mission to promote routes to HE:

It is not about progressing to HE, it is about being on a learning journey, it is about widening out to people and letting people know that HE is not for everyone (Learner Services Manager, College B).

This view coincided with the members of senior staff at College B who stated that increasing links to higher education institutions was not an immediate priority for the college. The members of staff at College B focused on policy aimed at widening access to those who are long-term unemployed or from economically deprived areas:

I think there has been more of a focus on getting the more disaffected for want of a better term 'underclass' who have been out of work and their fathers have been out of

work, there has been more of an incentive to get them in to college. That is more of a priority than getting people into university (Lecturer, Communications, College B).

The staff members at Colleges B and C felt that the focus was on transferable skills, acknowledging that people may have to constantly re-skill to remain employable. The curriculum was designed in relation to the demand of the local labour market and the needs of employers and also in response to the needs of the learners:

I think it is about looking to our employers, to the market out there, to be future-proofing, looking at what industries people are going to be working in, how we are going to support the numbers of people looking at second or third careers (HOTD, Hospitality, Sport and Creative Arts, College B).

Government policy has changed and it is now about looking at transferable skills. The days of someone holding the same job for a number of years has changed and your average person is going to hold numerous jobs over their lifetime (HOTD, Care, Social Sciences and Early Education, College C).

6.5 The Impact of performance indicators on college staff

Colleges are held to account by the SFC through the use of annual Performance Indicators. This influenced the provision offered in each of the colleges in subtly different ways. Mainstream provision at the three colleges was essentially skills based with a focus on transferable skills and human capital development that could be directly employed in the labour market. However, there were clear differences between the colleges with regards to

mediating this policy. College A exemplifies the skills agenda and works with unions to provide the most relevant transferable skills. College B has a high proportion of asylum seekers and immigrants who participate in ESOL courses and College C has very close links with the petro-chemical industry and provided specialised courses tailored to local employers in this area.

6.5.1 The pressure to meet targets

The members of teaching staff interviewed at the three colleges agreed that the role of the college was that of a preparation ground for learners, equipping them for employment or further study. The staff members interviewed at College A were more aware than those at Colleges B and C of the pressures on the colleges to meet funding targets and generate additional revenue.

> *There are more and more pressures on colleges in terms of sustainability and the need to generate further income streams is a definite pressure (Lecturer, Engineering, College A).*

> *I believe we have met our SUMS target and that is the problem, we are target-driven from the Scottish Government. That is not what education is about, I think that we need to move away from this target-driven education (Lecturer, Management, Marketing and Business, College A).*

The staff felt that the funding mechanism influenced the courses on offer.

It does make sense to get maximum SUMS, let's go and train scientists or engineers whether we need them or not (Lecturer, Management, Marketing and Business, College A).

Whereas the staff at College A felt that the college was much more driven by the funding and meeting SUMS targets, the staff at Colleges B and C felt that it was the local community which dictated what sort of courses the college offered.

Our job is to respond to the dynamic of this local area and we develop our portfolio, it's a funding council, not a curriculum planning council (Senior Lecturer, Early Education and Childcare, College B).

We look at the local community and where there is an employment need and where there is an employment progression. When we put in a request for a new programme we look at where there is the demand (HOTD, Care, Social Sciences and Early Education, College C)

Although College A was keen to market itself as internationally relevant, it did not offer specific courses for international markets. The staff members deemed the courses to be generic, appealing to the widest possible market. The colleges' close adherence to Scottish Government targets affected the types of courses offered by the colleges as they were expected to respond to trends and initiatives.

6.5.2 The changing nature of college provision

It was reported that the types of courses offered by the colleges had changed considerably over the years with more courses offered in the field of creative arts, the weakening of traditional links with industry for departments such as engineering and construction and a growth in childcare and hospitality courses. The region in which College C was based had seen a massive decline in the local manufacturing industry which had resulted in the college offering less provision based on heavy industry:

> *I think we used to have a mining department when I first came here but obviously that went out of the window with Thatcher, we have more biotechnology and more office based courses and more service area courses (Head of Learning Resources, College C).*

Another example of changes to the college curriculum would be the surge in growth in the tourism and hospitality industry which had resulted in increased enrolments in the department of leisure industries. One of the most popular areas with regards to student enrolments within College B was the department of social and community studies which had seen a marked growth in student activity in recent years and felt that part of its popularity was due to the strong employment links that were in place with the nursing and healthcare sector. The department was "very employment-based and had employers waiting to snap these students up at the end of their course" (HOTD, Social and Community Studies, College B). Provision was also driven by external factors such as changes in legislation surrounding working with children. When the Scottish Government introduces new requirements or identifies skills shortages in particular areas, the college sector is expected to respond accordingly and in a

relatively short period of time. Recent cuts to the public service sector, particularly the healthcare sector, could have a negative impact on the number of students choosing to study in this course area. This was one example of the close relationship between government policy and the college sector and demonstrated how changes to policy could affect the provision offered by the colleges. Despite the senior members of staff at College B stating that the college had no ambitions to become a feeder college to university, several members of staff stated that their departments had informal transfer agreements with higher education institutions.

> *We have an informal agreement with (local university) that they will take our students when they finish their course here. Our students are in very high demand because they (the local university) know that they will possess the skills to succeed on their course so we are very highly thought of here (Senior Lecturer, Health and Social Care, College B).*

> *I think that one thing that is important to full-time students is progressing to other courses, so skills development as far as acquiring a specific skill to work, there are good examples of that in Care where they have very specific vocational skills, but a lot of the work that we do isn't purely vocational, a lot of it is general education and people use it as a route into university. We had 170 full-time students last year who progressed into second or third year university (Assistant Principal, College B)*

Staff believed that if there was a demand for more formal agreements with universities from students then this was an area that they might have to expand and develop in order to remain competitive in a crowded marketplace.

6.6 Staff Attitudes to Widening Access

6.6.1 The importance of widening access

As discussed in the previous chapter, widening access to non-traditional groups of learners was believed to be a very important part of the colleges' work. Although the reasoning for widening access differed amongst the colleges, the college staff were in agreement that widening access was an important part of a college's responsibilities

> *The access-type courses that we offer allow students to come in and try out courses and that is very important that we widen access to different groups like that (Lecturer, Catering, College A).*

> *I think that is really our bread and butter around this area, many of the areas are areas of high deprivation so many of our courses start at very basic levels in order to help students get their foot in the door so to speak (Lecturer, Sport and Exercise, College B).*

> *For me there are students that can come to college traditionally and there are those that can't and I think that we need to do more for those who can't come traditionally (Head of Learning Resources, College C).*

The staff views were once again influenced by the colleges' culture and ethos. Although staff members in all three of the colleges regarded widening access as important, the staff

members from College B were more likely to view widening access in terms of social objectives whereas staff members at College A felt it was important to target certain groups in order to meet certain targets. The staff at College C were concerned with progression through the college believing that it was important that measures were in place to widen access to include learners who would not have previously been able to attend college or university.

6.6.2 Different attitudes in different departments

In addition to the different attitudes across the colleges, it was noticeable that staff members held very different attitudes towards widening access depending on which department they represented. Not every member of staff within Colleges A and C felt that initiatives to widen access were relevant to their department. The majority of staff members interviewed at College A's institute of engineering, construction and science felt that, although they were aware of the college's strategy concerning widening access, they did not think it really affected their department as they experienced a consistent demand for places from the same student demographic: mostly young, Scottish males.

> *I am aware that other departments are involved in widening access to specific groups of learners but that doesn't really concern us here as we are always full of the same types of people. We aren't really involved in it (Lecturer, Mechanical Engineering, College A).*

The staff members from the department of construction at College C displayed a similar ambivalence to widening access initiatives as they experienced a steady demand for places

from the same group of learners, year in, year out. By contrast, staff members in course areas such as Creative Industries, Sports, Tourism and Community Learning at College A and Creative Industries and Leisure Industries regarded widening access at the lowest level as very important to levels of student enrolment and retention. The difference in attitudes between the departments was less noticeable in College B, where widening access was viewed as a social objective across the whole college.

6.6.3 Working with disadvantaged groups

Increased provision at the lowest level was believed by the majority of lecturing staff at Colleges A and C as inherently problematic. Staff members were unhappy that widening access had led to some extra pressures with regard to the appropriate levels of training required to deal with increased numbers of students with low qualification levels and from particularly disadvantaged backgrounds.

> *I found teaching at a lower level is more difficult than teaching at a higher national degree level and I am having to change my methods in order to better communicate with the students as traditional methods do not work as well (Lecturer, Early Education and Childcare, College A).*

Staff members who were involved in widening access initiatives were aware of tensions amongst the teaching staff when it came to working with particular groups of students.

> *Some of the people can be very challenging so we have to put the right people in charge of the right groups to motivate them and bring them on. The people who*

manage and run that are very skilled (HOTD, Care, Social Sciences and Early Education, College C).

Achieving Scottish Funding Council targets in terms of pass rates was seen as particularly difficult for the members of staff who were running classes for non-traditional students who were more likely to drop out. Lecturers pointed out that this had nothing to do with the teaching or the quality of the course but felt that there was a pressure to get pass rates.

They need to balance whether they are going to offer these courses in socially excluded areas or whether they are going to get pass rates because that is the bottom line isn't it, we still need to get people passed (Lecturer, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, College C).

College staff felt that in spite of financial incentives from the Scottish Funding Council to recruit hard-to-reach groups, this did not adequately compensate for the challenges posed by these students and the penalties incurred by high drop-out rates. Some members of staff were also unhappy that their role had changed from one of teaching to student support. This was particularly evident when dealing with the growing numbers of younger students under the age of 16. Again, this opinion was not evident in the staff members at College B who recognised that students from disadvantaged areas made up a very large percentage of their student population and so expected to deal with these groups of learners more frequently than the staff at Colleges A and C.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter shows that where Scottish Government priorities align with the mission of the colleges, staff members are more willing to accept them. However, certain issues such as mergers, widening access and reaching funding targets have also led to tensions amongst the staff members.

Whilst the majority of senior management at Colleges A and C were supportive toward college mergers, there were greater levels of concern from members of staff who felt that the missions and culture of the larger institutions dominated the process. This was often driven by a desire to promote the economic objectives of the college, with less focus on the social needs of the local community. Although they accepted that the mergers were motivated by financial reasons, they were also concerned that many staff members had lost their jobs as a result. The merger process disrupted the established culture and identity of the colleges and this had led to tensions amongst members of staff and divisions between those who were previously employed by the smaller college and those employed by the larger college. College B had continued to provide courses for the local community and staff members were more secure (in terms of employment and identity) as a result. However, with the potential for future mergers on the horizon, this security could be compromised.

The staff members at Colleges A and C were more willing to accept policy initiatives from the Scottish Government because these aligned with the priorities of the college. Issues such as promoting higher level skills and adapting course content according to the requirements of higher education institutions were readily adopted by the senior management of Colleges A and C (as discussed in the previous chapter) and as such, met with little objection from staff

members at these colleges. By contrast, the staff members at College B were more critical of the Scottish Government's economic priorities regarding lifelong learning due to them being at odds with the overall mission of the college.

Widening access was perceived differently across the three colleges with staff members from A and C admitting that they were less comfortable when dealing with harder-to-reach groups. This had led to tensions amongst the staff with regards to achieving pass rates and SFC targets. Staff members from College A in particular were aware of the pressures to achieve performance indicators and funding targets, reflecting the dominance of the economic agenda in lifelong learning policy and in the mission of College A. Different attitudes to widening access were also evident across different departments within the colleges, with staff members who reported that they taught the same group of students year-in, year-out, less concerned with issues of widening access than other departments.

7. STUDENTS IN THE COLLEGES

7.1 Introduction

As is evident from the findings in the previous chapters, changes made at government policy level can be hugely significant for the mission, identity and culture of colleges. These policies are also subject to a great degree of mediation through the college staff producing different strategies or adaptations in the implementation of these policies.

As discussed in Chapter 3, a key priority for the Scottish Government has been to address the level of labour market detachment by reducing the number of school pupils leaving school and becoming part of the MCMC group (Scottish Executive 2006b). One strategy to do this has been to encourage colleges to work in partnership with schools to increase links and offer alternatives to school education for young people, especially those at risk of falling into the MCMC category, by keeping them engaged with society and part of their local community. Colleges were seen to be particularly well placed to do this as they could offer a practical, vocationally-oriented curriculum which, it was assumed, would appeal to this group of young people. This would meet both the economic and social objectives of government policy as it would develop skills in those learners which were relevant to the workplace and social inclusion would be ensured through participation in the labour market.

Drawing on focus group interviews conducted with college students, supplemented by interviews with members of senior management and college staff, this chapter will explore how Scottish Government policy on lifelong learning has affected the student population of the three colleges. In particular, it will look at how increasing numbers of younger learners,

by which I mean learners under the age of 16, have impacted on the colleges and how this groups of learners have been perceived by members of staff and by other students. The chapter will begin by exploring students' motivations for choosing a particular college and course area and what their key priorities are with regards to learning at college. It will also examine what effect their choice of course has on their social experience of college life.

7.2 Key priorities of students

Focus group interviews conducted with college students helped to understand their reasons and motivations for enrolling in a course at college and also their reasons for choosing a particular college over and above another.

7.2.1 Reasons for enrolling on a course at college

The Scottish Government hoped to strengthen the working relationship between schools and colleges by promoting a more vocationally relevant curriculum. The strategy, *Building the Foundations of a Lifelong Learning Society*, was published in November 2004 with the aim of providing a curriculum which prepares young people for the world of work by complementing the school curriculum with vocational training and clear progression routes through colleges and on to higher education (Scottish Executive, 2004a). The rationale behind this initiative was to provide those school pupils who were often unsettled at school with increased vocational options promoting a culture of education and increasing pupils' motivation to remain in education. The curriculum on offer at the three colleges reflected this Scottish Government initiative by focusing on equipping students with transferable skills. When questioned regarding their decision to enrol at college, the main reason cited by

students was that they viewed college as the best place to gain the necessary skills for employment in order to further their job prospects. One student stated:

> *I decided to do this course because it looked like it could help me get into the job I wanted. I was interested in getting into this area thought that coming to college would help me get what I needed (Female, Under 16, NQ Catering, College A).*

College was viewed as the most suitable place to gain vocational experience and qualifications that could be directly converted into real human capital. The students interviewed were aware of the importance of developing their skills in order to remain employable and the general feeling was that it was vital that the skills they learned at college were applicable to the local labour market. A typical view was:

> *It's about learning the skills that you need to go out after college and get a job, there's no point learning skills that don't relate to the job. I think the college knows what employers want and that's really important. (Male, 16-24, NQ Introduction to Business Administration, College C).*

By viewing any course content which did not relate directly to future employment leading to economic prosperity as not of value, it was clear that the students' dispositions towards learning were aligned with the economic priorities of the Scottish Government. This focus on vocational relevance was more pronounced in the younger students whereas older students were keen to engage in learning in order to learn more general skills which would help them develop various aspects of their life:

It's more to do with self-improvement, because it's a general all round course I thought it would lead to something. Of course it would be great if it got me a job where I could make loads of money but I realise that it might not lead directly to employment so I wanted to develop my skills so that's what I'm doing here, furthering my education. (Female, 25-29, NQ Administration and Information Technology, College B).

These older students had very different views on what college learning could do for them and viewed lifelong learning as more than just a way to prepare for a vocation but as a chance for personal development.

7.2.2 Reasons for selecting a particular college

Despite major investments in new campus buildings to attract greater numbers of students and increasing amounts of money dedicated to marketing the colleges and their facilities, it was clear from many students that they chose to attend the college which was situated closest to where they lived:

This college is much closer to home and I thought about going to (other college) but I didn't want to have to travel and this one is practically round the corner from me (Male, 16-24, NQ Mechanical Engineering, College A).

I came here because it's local I can just walk here whereas I would have had to get a bus or a train to … College (Male 16-24, NQ Furniture Design and Construction, College B).

I looked at going to XX to do a course there, it was horse management and business but I didn't quite fancy it because of the trek getting there. So transport was an issue (Female, 16-24, NQ Introduction to Business Administration, College C).

Convenience and familiarity were the most common reasons given for choosing to attend a particular college. This demonstrated the importance of colleges maintaining links with their local community and offering provision which is relevant to the local labour market. Many college students simply could not afford to commute to a different college and stated that the most accessible college was often their only realistic option. They also reported that they lacked the funds for independent accommodation which many students who decide to go to university possess in order to attend a university many miles from home.

The second reason given for choosing a particular college was the local reputation. The students interviewed felt that the colleges had very good reputations in their local area and good word-of-mouth was also felt to play a part in their decision to attend. The students felt that Colleges A and C were very widely publicised and that their presence in schools was a key factor in raising awareness of the colleges:

I think it (College A) is the one that's most talked about. I heard that this college was pretty good and it has a good reputation. It's promoted at school by teachers and guidance staff as something to do after school (Male, 16-24, NQ Mechanical Engineering).

It's advertised the most at the school, they've got the most prospectuses for (College C) they've got big piles of them so it's easier to get a hold of one (Male, 16-24, NQ Introduction to Business Administration).

This reflected a key marketing strategy highlighted by senior management at Colleges A and C. By increasing their presence in local schools the senior management hoped that potential students would be aware of the colleges at an earlier age:

We use all mediums of communication, we use radio, the internet, we use various campaigns, we run school road shows. We are particularly engaged with schools: we went to schools and teach and pupils from the school come in here so we are engaging with them at the earliest opportunity (Executive Director, Hospitality, Sports and Tourism, College A).

We work with head teachers in the area, we can promote the college through the schools in order to get our presence known (Associate Principal, College C).

As noted in Chapter 5, the senior management at College B utilised good word-of-mouth in the local community as a key part of its marketing campaign. This appeared to have been successful amongst the students interviewed:

I know a lot of people who have said the college is good and recommended coming here. It really helps to have that reputation in the local community as something that can help people from around here (Male, 18-25, NQ Administration and Information Technology, College B).

As well as proximity and local reputation, personal contacts influenced students' choice of college. Many of the students taking part in the focus groups stated that they had friends or relatives in the local community who had previously attended college and although some of the students felt that this had not influenced their decision to participate, others acknowledged that the positive feedback from their friends or relatives went a long way in convincing them to enrol at college:

> *I would say it did because my auntie was at college when I was still at school and she was saying how great it was and she encouraged me to look at the prospectus (Male 25-40, NQ Introduction to Travel and Tourism, College A).*

> *I think it helps to know other people who have gone to college. If other people in the area are doing it then it's more of an acceptable thing to do rather than stay unemployed (Female, 40+, NQ Administration and Information Technology, College B).*

> *Yeah, my mother was at college in London and did secretarial studies. My wife went to college as well, again for secretarial and administration (Male, 40+, NQ Introduction to Business Administration, College C).*

The students acknowledged that enrolling in a course of education at college could be an intimidating process and stated that knowing someone who had previously attended the college was extremely helpful in making the decision to enrol at college. It was particularly important for the older learners interviewed to have known someone their own age who had

returned to learning as they felt that this reduced the stigma associated with enrolling at college later in life.

> *It definitely helps to know someone who has gone through the same thing. I'm not saying I wouldn't have done it, but it certainly takes away some of the element of the unknown and makes you feel like it is something you could do too. College is seen as something for young people and it's good to know that not everyone thinks that (Female, 25-59, NQ Administration and Information Technology, College B).*

It was clear that the majority of the students interviewed viewed colleges as the route to employment and prioritised human capital objectives. The students felt that having a local college which delivered vocationally-relevant provision and catered for the needs of local employers was extremely important in helping them gain employment. The next section will examine what effect students' choice of subject has on the generation of social capital, including who they interact with and the environment in which they will be based.

7.3 Subject choice and its effect on social interaction

As discussed in Chapter 6, lecturing staff in colleges have long been separated due to their skills set, class or age and this segregation was transferred to the students through their choice of subject area.

7.3.1 Subject choice and gender

According to the members of staff interviewed at the colleges, the distribution of students varied between campuses according to their age and gender. Students on more traditional, vocational courses in the Institute of Engineering, Construction and Science at College A felt that their course area appealed to a certain type of student and because they only socialised with these students, this was also the impression they had of the entire college:

> *It's mostly younger folk at this college, especially in these subjects where it's mostly young guys so yeah, I would say it's young guys around here and I don't see many older folk (Male, Under 16, NQ Motor Vehicle, College A).*

The students felt that local attitudes regarding 'appropriate' courses for males and females were a significant factor which led to many students feeling under social pressures to choose certain course areas:

> *I think it is much easier and more accepted for males to choose areas such as sports or motor vehicle repair and for females to choose childcare, beauty therapy or hairdressing and I think that affects your choices (Female, 16-24, NQ Uniformed Services, College A).*

The focus group conducted with students from the School of Design and Construction at College B contained only one female who felt that she was very much in the minority in the department but this did not come as a surprise to her.

> *I expected the course to be full of guys because not many girls do courses like this. I think attitudes are changing a bit but people are still surprised to see me going into this department instead of nursing or hairdressing (Female, 16-24, NQ Landscape Design and Construction, College B).*

The senior management at College C stated that they were keen to have a more even age and gender balance across campuses. They stated that when the new college estates were built, they would attempt to provide courses that had traditionally appealed to young males such as engineering and construction alongside courses which appealed to more diverse groups such as creative industries. This subject was also addressed in a promotional video where it was felt to be extremely important for apprentices to mingle with other students in the college's new campus.

However, the students interviewed stated that these bonding sessions were mostly confined to courses of similar ilk and did not allow them to mix with students enrolled on courses in other parts of the college. The students enrolled on courses which contained sports modules stated that they were involved in football clubs and similar sports activities and that the college had a sports union which was useful for social interaction but added that this was normally populated by students on sports courses. Across all of the colleges the students strongly identified with their subject departments and the career paths mapped out by progression routes which confined their social interactions to subject areas rather than across the whole college.

7.3.2 Utilising social spaces

Across the three colleges, efforts to address the restrictive social interactions fostered by subject divisions had resulted in recent campus developments being designed to contain more social spaces for students to interact and this was seen as a positive move by the students, particularly learners under the age of 25 who may have had more free time to socialise and make use of these spaces:

> *There's a lot of social spaces where we can meet up and I think the college knows that the students enjoy these spaces and make use of them but it's mostly the younger students, you don't see many older learners hanging about (Female, 16-24, NQ Science, College B).*

The older learners were more likely to have additional responsibilities such as families or work commitments which restricted their free time. Newly refurbished areas at College C had been re-designed with the hope of attracting more females, since it was mainly young men, usually modern apprentices, who traditionally used this social space. These areas had been decorated by the students themselves and it was hoped that this would instil a sense of pride and responsibility so that the students would be more inclined to look after and make regular use of them. The Associate Principal of College C commented:

> *The students now have a base where they meet for social areas where there are pool tables that they can access and they can go and sit and relax. The students were involved in designing that and it's not vandalised because they have done it (Associate Principal, College C).*

This was a similar approach that the college adopted when considering the college's community campus. The building was situated in the middle of the community and the local population were able to enter the campus and utilise its dining facilities or beauty therapy clinic. It was hoped that by opening the campus up to the community, it would be a source of pride. The staff members interviewed felt that this had been extremely successful and reported that this campus had experienced no vandalism despite being in an area which was previously felt to be prone to property damage.

7.3.3 Different physical environments

The physical environment of the colleges, particularly Colleges A and C differed greatly in different subject areas, reflecting the characteristics of the students within these departments and mimicking the future working environments. For example, courses such as beauty therapy and holistic therapies, taught within the institute of creative industries at College A, were primarily aimed at young females and this was reflected in the physical environment. Soft furnishings and indoor plants were used to create a more traditionally 'feminine' space, influencing the learning culture developed there. By contrast, courses such as mechanical engineering and motor vehicle repair, taught within the institute of engineering, construction and science were housed in an entirely different campus with the bare minimum of social spaces and a distinct lack of furnishings. The areas where traditional, vocational subjects were taught tended to be housed in much older, run-down areas where very little attempt had been made to renovate these areas and bring them up to the standard of the rest of the college. This directly contrasted with the more modern, highly furnished areas in the main campus. Course areas such as creative industries, business studies and hospitality tended to be housed

in these more plush surroundings which contained many social spaces. This was particularly evident at College A where the main campus had been recently renovated to include a large atrium which also contained a cafe. This space was designed to promote social interaction. However, although this space was intended for all students at College A, it was noted that not all students were based at this campus and did not tend to use this space:

> *We're based at this campus so we don't tend to use (the atrium). We have our own refectory here and our own library space so we only go there if we have a class there which isn't that often (Male, 16-24, NQ Mechanical Engineering, College A).*

The difference between the campus areas was also clearly noticed by the students at College C:

> *The differences between the departments are quite noticeable; some areas that are mostly for females are much nicer than areas with loads of guys. I don't know if that's because of what the students do to the areas but you can really see it (Female, 25-59, NQ Introduction to Business Administration, College C).*

Whereas the students from Colleges A and C felt that there were great differences between different course areas and campuses, the students at College B stated that they felt having the college on one campus helped create a sense that they were part of a larger college and rather than simply identifying themselves with their course area they regarded themselves as part of the overall college community:

It feels like we are all the same here. I think because we're based here and other departments are based here it helps (Female, 16-24, NQ Travel and Tourism, College B).

We all use the same common areas so we're interacting with everyone rather than just speaking to people on your own subject. That happens, I mean, they will be the people you'll get to know best but there's much more feeling of being part of the college. I know guys at other colleges who never see people who aren't doing the same course as them (Male, 16-24, NQ Landscape Design and Construction, College B).

Although the students at College B acknowledged that they tended to interact more with other students from similar course areas, it was noticeable that the senior management's strategy of maintaining one main campus had succeeded in fostering a greater sense of community and social interaction, resulting in greater opportunity to develop bridging social capital.

Students' choice of course area greatly influenced their level of social interaction, particularly at Colleges A and C which were spread over several campuses. The physical environments of different departments reflected the future working environments which were often strongly gendered. These physical environments generated particular types of social capital and helped to prepare the students for their future employment culture. The students' choice of course area was greatly influenced by economic objectives which in turn limited their potential for social interaction since they were confined to separate campuses and only interacted with students from backgrounds similar to their own. The Scottish Government has succeeded in emphasising lifelong learning at college in terms of its future economic benefits. The next

section will examine how recent policy initiatives for colleges to increase the number of learners under the age of 16 have impacted on the student population and the college staff.

7.4 Government policy on young learners and how this affects the three colleges

7.4.1 A reminder of government policy regarding learners under the age of 16

The Labour-led Scottish Executive committed itself in 2003 to enabling 14-16 year olds to develop vocational skills and improve their employment prospects by allowing them to undertake courses in further education colleges as part of the school-based curriculum. This was a deliberate move to address this group before they dropped out of the education system and became part of the MCMC group. As a result of these government initiatives, partnerships between schools and colleges have increased greatly in recent years to the extent that learners under the age of 16 occupy a significant proportion of learners in Scotland's colleges as illustrated in Figure 7 (page 75).

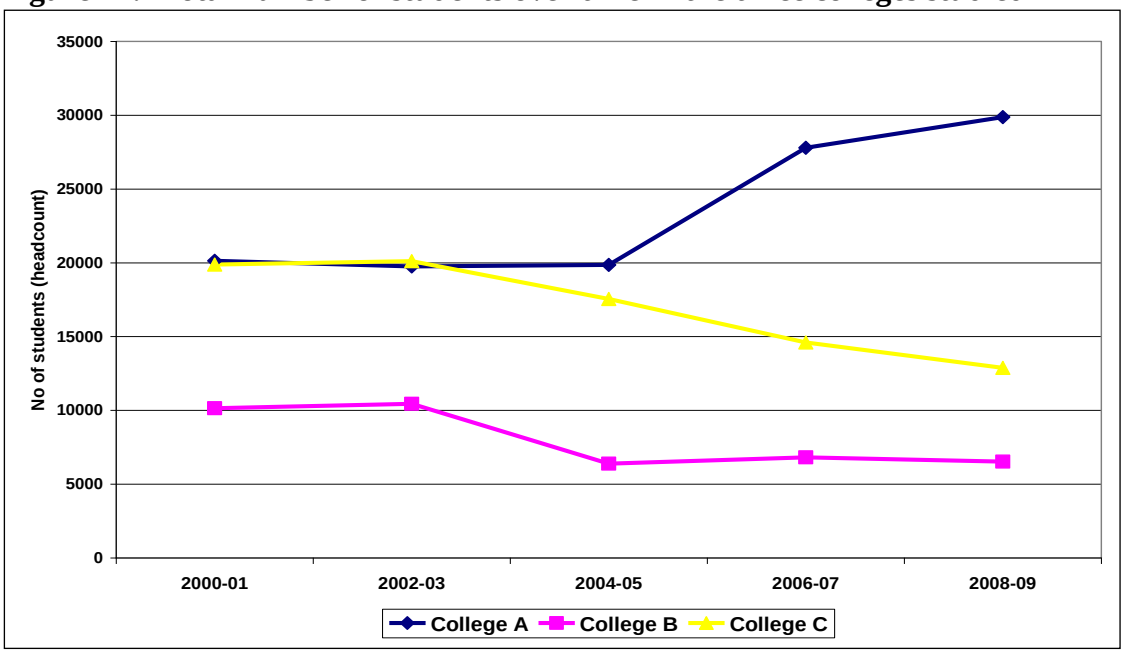
The Scottish Government has stated that the consequences of having a large group of individuals not in education, employment or training impacts on wider society by standing in the way of individuals and society achieving the optimum economic productivity and social inclusion (Scottish Executive, 2005c). This is an example of the intertwining of the human and social capital objectives of lifelong learning policy to prevent young people dropping out of education. As discussed in Chapter 3, whereas in previous years the participation rates for both males and females peaked at the age of 17, in the academic year 2007-08, the number of students in the under 16 age group was greater than the number of students in the 16-18 and

19-24 age group. This was coupled with a drop in the number of students aged 25-59 from a peak in 2002-03 (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010).

7.4.2 The impact of younger learners on the student population of the three colleges

Calls to increase the numbers of learners under the age of 16 have impacted on the three colleges studied to different extents. As Figure 12 illustrates, Colleges B and C experienced a decrease in overall student numbers between 2002-03 and 2008-09, particularly College C. In contrast, College A had experienced significant growth in student numbers over this same period.

Figure 12: Total number of students over time in the three colleges studied

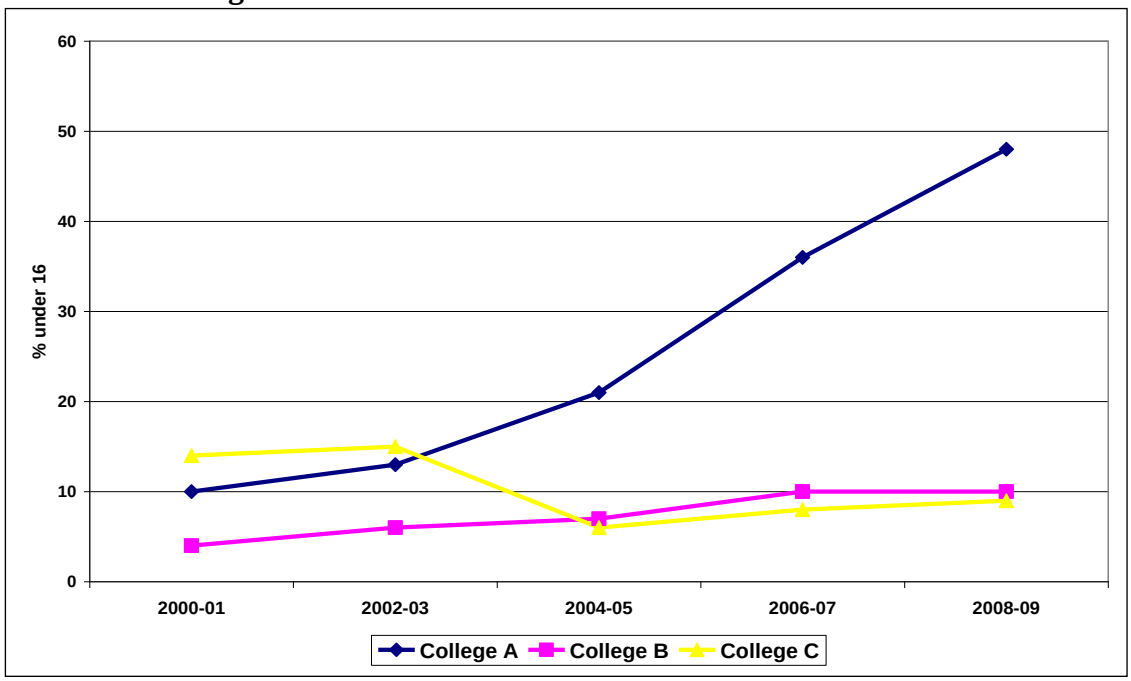


Source: www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010. (Note: Numbers for College A and C pre merger shows the total number of students in the colleges that were merged)

Further examination of these statistics shows that the rise in student numbers at College A can be mostly attributed to the rise in the number of students under the age of 16. As shown in Figure 13, College A has experienced a significant growth in students under the age of 16 from 2000-01 to 2008-09. College A differed from Colleges B and C by having a very high

proportion of learners under the age of 16. Indeed, 14,201 students under the age of 16 attended College A in the academic year 2008-09, accounting for 48 per cent of the overall student headcount (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010). Compared with College B which had 650 students accounting for 10 per cent of student activity and College C which had 1,190 students under the age of 16 accounting for 9 per cent of students in the year 2008-09, it was clear that College A had done the most to adhere to government policy concerning under 16s.

Figure 13: Percentage of student population under 16 over time (based on headcount) in the three colleges studied



Source: www.sfc.ac.uk, 2010. (Note: Numbers for College A and C pre merger shows the total number of students in the colleges that were merged)

This rise in students under the age of 16 was highly significant to College A's burgeoning student population and demonstrated that despite its efforts to recruit international students, its recent success in attracting greater numbers of students was mostly down to increasing numbers of younger students entering the college. But what has led to this noticeable increase in younger learners at College A?

7.4.3 The significant increase in younger learners at College A

The Scottish Government has stated that it values and encourages the collaborative links between colleges and schools (Scottish Government, 2007a). Colleges have been urged to increase their links with schools and promote more options for people of school age to study at college. The senior management of College A stated that children as young as primary 5 were brought into the college in order to increase their awareness as they were seen as a 'long-term investment' for the college and for Scotland's future economic development (Vice Principal, College A). College A had strong links with local schools, with members of college staff finding time to teach in schools, encouraging pupils to visit the college and working with the careers guidance staff at schools to make sure that students were aware of the college at the earliest opportunity. The college was promoted in schools as a stepping-stone to university or employment:

> *We teach in schools, we run special projects for primary school kids so the kids in school are aware of us from a young age, they are aware of the college and what it does and when it comes time for them to leave school, college is seen as an opportunity for them (Executive Director, Engineering, Construction and Science, College A).*

The members of staff at College A stated that the college was extremely supportive of new government initiatives such as 'Skills for Work'.

> *We are very keen to promote Skills for Work as a way for younger people to come into the college from schools. We see a lot of school pupils under 16 because of this so*

that skews the average age of the students. These school pupils come in for perhaps 20 hours a week (Vice Principal, College A).

The staff members at College A were all aware the college had a very high proportion of learners under the age of 16:

A lot of the programmes tend to be pitched at school-leavers or even younger. We know that this is a priority for the government (Lecturer, Engineering, College A).

The student population has changed greatly over the last ten years. We have started moving into the school-college partnership a lot more and have got much more young people under the age of 16 and that is not just my department (Curriculum Head, Special Programmes, College A).

Although some members of staff at College A felt that the move to include greater numbers of under 16s was indicative of the college sector overall:

I would say that across the college we have started to get a younger audience but that is also because of the changing nature of the sector (Executive Director, Creative Industries, College A).

However, it was clear that College A had a very high proportion of under 16s when compared to Colleges B and C. By Contrast, the other two colleges, College B in particular, served areas with high levels of unemployment and could be more focused on serving these traditional groups of learners resulting in the 25-59 age group containing the largest

proportion of students. Although staff members at Colleges B were aware of an increase in under 16s they were also aware that the college had become more ethnically diverse:

> *There are probably more young learners with our initiatives with school-college partnerships and Skills for Work programmes and because of our ESOL programmes probably more different nationalities than perhaps ten years ago (Principal, College B)*

> *The population of the students is becoming more diverse and that's a good thing. We are also taking on more school pupils through our school-college partnerships…the Scottish Government is right behind addressing the MCMC group so that is one of the reasons we are seeing an increase (HOTD, Social and Community Studies, College B).*

The staff members at College C were also aware of a slight increase in younger students but also pointed out that they felt there had also been an increase in older learners:

> *(The student population is) very mixed I would say. Certainly in my department we have a lot of adult returners, sport tends to be school leavers with one or two older learners, hairdressing is a lot of school leavers and beauty therapy has a lot of adult returners. The number of school leavers coming in has certainly increased but the numbers of adult learners has also increased (HOTD, Leisure Industries, College C).*

> *We have grown in terms of adult full-time students in the past five or six years mainly because our programmes have changed but some departments are working with*

students as young as primary school…The Scottish Government is promoting more links with schools so I think that will increase in the future (HOTD, Construction, College C)

It was clear that staff members at all three colleges were aware of increased school-college partnerships and the Scottish Government's desire to include younger students to avoid them becoming part of the MCMC group. However, whilst staff members at Colleges B and C were aware of increases in other groups, staff members at College A were only aware of the increasing numbers of learners under 16 as is reflected in the statistics.

7.5 Working with younger students

Many of these under 16 learners choose to come to college rather than continue at school and progress to fifth and sixth year. There may also have been an element of coercion involved, since schools may encourage challenging young men to believe that the less authoritarian learning environment of the colleges may better suit their needs. Some lecturers stated that when they first joined the college, school provision was something that was just beginning to evolve with only a small group of students on an alternative curriculum. This had developed into a large part of the provision within their departments so that "about 1300 school pupils were coming through the doors in a week" (Depute Principal, College C). The vast majority of staff predicted that this number would increase in the near future.

7.5.1 Younger students' views on learning at college

Several of the students interviewed who were under the age of 16 stated that they decided to come to college because they preferred the vocational nature of the courses and felt they had out-grown secondary school:

> *I took college instead of going on to fifth year as I felt that college was much better suited for me than school and it is a much better environment (Male, Under 16, NQ Catering, College A).*

Two of the students interviewed were enrolled on the Construction Skills (Pre-vocational) course at College B which was designed to prepare young school leavers for employment in the construction industry. One young man commented:

> *I decided to come to college as I wanted to get a job and this (course) can help me do that. At school I was being taught things that I felt I didn't need but here it's all about getting the skills for the job (Male, Under 16, Construction Skills, College B).*

These younger students stated that they valued the social relationships formed at college and that it was important that the relationships they had with the staff members at college were very different from their relationships at school. The social relationships formed at college helped to promote college as an adult world by promoting adult relationships which were less authoritarian. They commented that they were 'treated with respect' and 'like an adult' at college which was very different to the way they were treated at school:

They were like cardboard cut-outs at school, just in you go and back out you come but here you can stay in the class for hours and just sit and talk and even if you see them (lecturers) outside they will stop and have a chat to you and it is just a completely different world at college compared to the school (Male, Under 16, NQ Motor Vehicle, College A).

This was seen as particularly important for younger learners who may have had negative experiences at school. The students instantly recognised that college learning was very different from learning at school and felt that they were treated with a lot more respect at college. One student commented:

The minute you walk through those doors and you are calling one of your lecturers (by their first name) it just gives you a whole new perspective of what studying actually is. It changes so much in such a short space of time (Male, Under 16, Pre-Apprenticeship Electrical Engineering, College C).

Although the younger students claimed that they valued the human capital benefits of learning such as developing strong links to the world of work, they also clearly valued social capital elements such as the development of social relationships with their fellow students and the college staff. By developing a more informal relationship than they would have had with their teachers at school, the students felt that they were treated with more respect and thus, accepted more readily the responsibility for their own learning:

It's completely different (from school). As soon as you come into the college you are calling tutors by their first names and it just feel more grown-up. It gives you a new idea of what learning can be (Male, Under 16, NQ Travel and Tourism, College B).

Overall, younger students in the colleges were very positive about their experiences and were developing a more autonomous approach to learning. These findings reflected those of Davies and Biesta (2007) who claimed that students valued the teaching and learning at college as long as 'what they learn', 'how they learn' and 'where they learn' was sufficiently different from their experiences at school.

7.5.2 The impact on college staff

Lecturers were particularly ambivalent about working with younger students. Staff members at College A were aware of government policy of promoting college as the means of keeping disaffected young people in education:

College is one of the provisions that the government is trying to promote that young people should be allowed to come to college much quicker and much easier if they are not doing well at school so certainly the government is helping to promote that through things like the MCMC and making sure that young people have got something to go to when they leave school because there are so many that disappear out of the school system (Curriculum Head, Education and Care Studies, College A).

The colleges worked in partnership with local social work departments in order to target those students who were at risk of falling out of the education system and becoming part of

the MCMC group. This resulted in greater numbers of younger students under the age of 16 entering the colleges. Some members of staff at College B were of the opinion that college was a much more suitable place for these young people than school as they were treated more like adults and benefited from the increased levels of responsibility:

> *The college tends to work better for young people that have left school rather than dragging them back to school because that doesn't work and it is proven (Department Head, Design and Construction, College B).*

These members of staff viewed these courses as highly successful and felt that getting people to enter the college by any means, such as enrolling on an access course, was a great success, even if it was only part-time.

> *This is a huge success because ordinarily these kids wouldn't get the chance to take part in a mainstream course because they are told it is unsuitable for them. The access courses give the learners a sense of worth and builds up confidence amongst the staff as well (Department Head, Hospitality, Sport and Creative Arts, College B).*

Courses such as these were believed by some members of staff to go a long way to nurturing positive attitudes to learning and change negative perceptions which may have developed at school. However, the positive view presented above was not shared by all members of staff. The majority of lecturing staff, most notably at Colleges B and C, questioned the suitability of such courses, particularly for younger learners, and argued that far from building up confidence amongst students and staff, some access courses leave the staff quite disillusioned:

> *They didn't want to be there, they didn't want to learn anything, they were very good at the practical stuff in very, very short concentration spans and the set up didn't lend itself well to that kind of delivery (Lecturer, Business, College B).*

The high percentage of young learners under the age of 16 within the colleges came as a surprise to some members of the teaching staff who felt that they would be dealing with young adults or adult returners who may have had a break from education and who would possess very different attitudes to their learning.

> *I certainly had this impression when I started here that I would be teaching mature students, either young people or adults who wanted to learn. What we are finding is that we are getting more and more students who are under 18 and are dumped upon us by the schools (Lecturer, Tourism, College C).*

According to these respondents, the increase in younger learners "hasn't been seen that favourably amongst staff" (Lecturer, Sport and Exercise, College B). As discussed in Chapter 6, many staff members from vocational backgrounds had previously worked in a specific trade and were used to dealing with a very specific group of learners who entered the college in order to be taught vocational skills and secure employment in that trade. This left these members of staff ill-equipped to deal with the additional responsibilities inherent in working with these groups of students.

The colleges had adapted their curriculum in order to suit the influx of younger learners. For example, areas such as hairdressing and beauty therapy used to be offered as part of College

C's department of general education which also included subjects such as English. This area had grown into a department of its own offering articulation routes to university. The members of staff believed that part of the popularity of this area could have contributed to the increase in younger learners, particularly school age learners, who entered the college through the increased school-college partnerships but were unsure of which subject to choose, instead opting for the simplest choice.

> *You sometimes get lots of young, disadvantaged people who come in and want to be a hairdresser or work in childcare. If they don't get into childcare they will just say they will just do hairdressing (Associate Principal, College C).*

The members of staff believed that the younger students lacked a distinct career path and direction when they entered the college and put this down to their youth and inexperience.

7.5.3 Disrupting the established culture

Colleges are presented as a more suitable route for students who may feel that they have out-grown school, reflecting their future employment options and presenting the opportunity to interact with adult learners which can have a beneficial effect on school pupils by modifying disruptive behaviour. However, the increase in younger students was viewed by many members of staff as disrupting the established college culture of learning:

> *We have certainly more younger students coming to college, probably more student population with less qualifications and I think that is one of the biggest changes (Department Manager, Early Education and Childcare, College A).*

Many lecturers were at best ambivalent about working with the under-16 age group because they felt that they did not fit in to the established learning culture of the college which developed individual responsibility and autonomy. The lecturers believed that older students shared their ambivalence:

> *Some of the adult students would say that there is a big difference because they think that colleges are an adult environment and some of the young people shouldn't be there because they are there to study and some of the young ones run about and cause mayhem in the building (Lecturer, Business, College B).*

This was a view confirmed by a minority of the older students aged above 40 who stated that dealing with some younger learners could be difficult for the lecturers:

> *It's quite hard to get them to settle down sometimes and half the lesson can be spent keeping everyone in check which can be quite frustrating but what can you do (Male, 25-59, NQ Administration and Information Technology, College B).*

A minority of older students interviewed felt that colleges were not the place for such young learners and that their disruptive behaviour would impede the learning of both the older and younger students. However, having an adult learner in a class with younger students was thought by several lecturers to improve the learning environment within the classroom as the older students were very vocal about any disruptions to their learning. A class comprised completely of younger students could sometimes contain many immature learners and a good

mix of younger and older individuals was thought to be the best balance for an optimal learning environment. As one member of staff noted:

> *An adult returner helps a lot of the students because I think that they bring a lot of peer learning for these youngsters and when I am in the classroom a good balanced group is good. I think some of the major issues with our groups is if there are no adult returners in the group, if it is all youngsters then it can create more problems (Curriculum Head, Business, Management and Computing, College A).*

Despite a feeling of resentment from some older learners, the majority of students interviewed agreed that it was important to have a mix of ages and backgrounds: as illustrated by these comments from students of different ages:

> *(College) widens your opportunities for meeting new people which is always good. If you are just sticking with people from the same age group and stuff it gets a bit dull after a while and younger guys tend to lose their concentration (Female, Under 16, NQ Catering, College A).*

> *I really enjoy working with all sorts of people of different ages, I think that's important and helps build your confidence and social skills (Female, 16-24, NQ Uniformed Services, College A).*

> *It's helped to build bridges that otherwise wouldn't have been there. I mean since I've came to college I've spoken to people that otherwise I would never have spoken to and I have helped folk that otherwise I would never have helped and I've had help*

from people that would never have helped me (Male, 25-29, NQ Introduction to Business Administration, College C).

The majority of students interviewed appreciated that a mix of students of different ages and from different backgrounds made for a more balanced group. However, students on courses traditionally dominated by young males were less likely to have the opportunity to experience this social diversity as they tended to mainly interact with students who were very similar to themselves in terms of age and social background.

7.6 Conclusion

It was clear that many students made the decision to enrol on a course at college based on human capital assumptions. They believed it would lead to employment and result in future economic prosperity. This reflected the Scottish Government's lifelong learning agenda and their focus on colleges as locations for generating human capital where education and skills are automatically converted into economic prosperity. This was particularly true for younger learners who were in the main motivated by future employment opportunities whereas older learners valued college learning as a source of personal development and social interaction.

Despite the clear economic agenda behind students' motivations for attending college, the findings in this chapter also highlight the importance of social capital to college attendance. Students felt that it was important to know someone who had previously attended college, their environment having a significant effect on their educational aspirations. This was particularly the case for older learners who may have felt their return to learning would be viewed negatively. In addition, students also highlighted the importance of the colleges being

local and having a good reputation in the local community, again demonstrating the importance of social capital.

It was also evident that certain subject areas were highly segregated due to age or gender of the students. Subject areas were designed to mimic the workplace and some were heavily populated by the same groups of students every year despite the colleges' attempts to address this by increasing communal social areas and widening access. This segregation restricts social interaction and limits the social capital to 'bonding' rather than 'bridging'. Only College B had been successful in promoting social interaction across the whole college, complemented by having one main campus where students from all subjects crossed paths.

Policy from the Scottish Government has encouraged colleges to increase provision for 14-16 year olds. Although an increase in these younger learners had been noticed by staff at Colleges B and C, at College A the proportion of these learners has increased hugely since the turn of the century due to the college's willingness to adopt government policy and pursue funding initiatives. The inclusion of these younger students divided opinion with some members of staff of the opinion that these students were too young to attend college. It was felt that many of these younger learners lacked distinct career paths and in the end opted for the simplest course available to them, requiring the colleges to increase the amount of provision in these areas. Some members of staff viewed the inclusion of younger students as a pragmatic measure to take the most disruptive students out of school but keep them attached to the education system. It was believed that the increase of younger students challenged the established learning culture of the college and of the older students. However, the vast majority of students interviewed (including those under 16), valued both the economic and social opportunities college brought them, highlighting the importance of

vocational relevance and the opportunity to socialise and engage with people they would not mix with outside of college.

8. Conclusions and Discussion

8.1 Introduction

This thesis began by posing the overarching research question:

- What is government policy in relation to Scotland's colleges with regard to social and economic objectives and how is this policy mediated differently in three diverse colleges?

This thesis has explored how lifelong learning is understood and enacted across three diverse colleges in Scotland. It investigates the tensions between the use of lifelong learning as the means of promoting economic growth through the development of human capital, and as a means of promoting social inclusion through the development of social capital. The central theme of this thesis is the extent to which lifelong learning policy serves the interests of global capitalism in the pursuit of profit, or whether it is able to foster "a more humane and benign version of capitalism which values individuals' aspirations for personal growth through education and regards social cohesion as an end in itself, not simply as a means of maximising economic outputs" (Riddell and Weedon, 2012, p 6).

In addressing the research questions, it became clear that a number of in-built tensions existed within the colleges between the corporate image presented by the senior management and marketing material and the academic culture and identity of different members of staff. It was also evident that there were distinct differences between the three colleges with regards to their mediation of government policy and the degree to which they adopted certain policy

initiatives, such as working with younger learners under the age of 16, and pursued various funding targets and performance indicators.

The following chapter draws on the findings presented in the previous chapters and frames the discussion around these main findings. The chapter begins by discussing the main findings in relation to the research questions before exploring the findings in relation to the wider literature and discussing the implications for these findings.

8.2 A summary of the findings

8.2.1 Dominant discourse in Scottish lifelong learning policy

Reviewing Scottish Government lifelong learning policy, it was clear that there was an increased emphasis on the economic benefits inherent in participation in college education. Lifelong learning has been credited with 'developing and enhancing the skills of Scotland's people' (www.scotland.gov.uk, 2010) and has been viewed in terms of its economic contribution. Scotland's colleges are seen as important contributors to the future workforce. The economic function of learning as a generator of human capital, where the acquired skills and qualifications contribute to national and individual economic productivity, has come to dominate current definitions of lifelong learning presented in both *The Lifelong Learning Skills Strategy* (Scottish Government 2007a) and the *Scottish Government Economic Strategy* (Scottish Government, 2007b). The Scottish Government has highlighted the important role which the college sector can play in increasing levels of human capital in Scottish society (Scottish Government, 2007b). Time spent in college is equated with future economic prosperity, skills development and increased employability. In this sense, the Scottish

Government are viewed as investors who wish to see a suitable return in terms of increased levels of human capital. This assumes that higher levels of education will increase Scotland's economic growth; however debate still remains over the legitimacy of this assumption (Rindermann, 2008; Bowman and Woolf, 1994). Applying the principles of economics to education has come under criticism as it views individuals as the property of the state and as units of investment. In this mode of thinking, some groups of learners would be more worthy of investment due to their increased rate of return than other groups and this would appear to clash with issues of inclusion and widening access. Functioning as a form of social control, engaging in post-16 education is presented as an individual responsibility in order to remain employable and receive certain benefits. Debate still remains over the moral underpinnings of human capital assumptions where individuals are viewed as resources. However, the personal development function of lifelong learning appears to have dropped off the agenda somewhat and the commodification of knowledge has come to dominate as is evident in Scottish Government policy (Scottish Government 2007a; 2007b; 2009).

8.2.2 The lifelong learning agenda in the three colleges

The findings of this research show that the three colleges included in this study differed with regards to their mission and culture and it was clear that this influenced the way in which they interpreted the government's lifelong learning agenda.

The senior management at College A (and to some degree, College C) were more willing to adopt a managerialist ethos, focusing on funding targets and performance indicators which focused on easily-measurable targets such as student enrolments and retention rather than more complicated goals concerning social cohesion and community engagement. The senior

management of Colleges A and C readily accepted lifelong learning in terms of economic priorities and the generation of human capital, reflecting the principles which underlie current Scottish Government policy. This was particularly evident at College A where striving to meet performance targets focused on increasing student numbers (particularly under 16's) and increasing its links with higher education institutions, resulting in the college being the only college out of the three included in this study which had recently experienced a growth in student numbers (Figure 12, p 196). Widening access to non-traditional groups was also perceived in economic terms with the Scottish Funding Council driving the colleges' work with these targeted groups. This proved to be an issue of contention between the college management and members of staff at Colleges A and C who felt that the challenges of dealing with non-traditional students out-weighed the financial incentives. Economic objectives were also at the forefront of major decisions including the college mergers and new campus developments which were designed to increase student numbers and catchment areas. The staff members at Colleges A and C were concerned that the merger process had resulted in a disruption of the established culture of the colleges and resulted in a loss of individual identity. As a result of merging and expansion, the campuses of Colleges A and C were spread across several sites and this had resulted in a fragmentation of the college with many staff members feeling isolated from other members of staff within the college.

The senior management at College B had very different priorities to Colleges A and C. Lifelong learning at College B was viewed in terms of widening access at the lowest level, promoting social interaction in a bid to address problems of unemployment and social exclusion in the local community. Rather than focusing on funding targets, the senior management of College B stated that it was their duty to address underlying social problems in the area through widening access to lifelong learning. It was felt that the best way to do

this was to equip them with the skills and competencies necessary to facilitate engagement with the local labour market. The education on offer at College B was clearly geared towards the needs of employers and promoting individual employability. The members of staff at College B had not experienced a merger and as such, identified more strongly with the overall ethos and culture of the college. College B was also situated in one location which helped create a sense of the college being united as opposed to the expansive spread of Colleges A and C.

Colleges in Scotland originally developed in order to meet local needs, resulting in individual identities. However, incorporation introduced a form of funding by results which places the spotlight on student retention and achievement. As a result, many colleges lost their individual identities and so turned to marketing in order to differentiate themselves in a competitive marketplace. The different ways in which the colleges were marketed also reflected the extent of their focus on academic issues such as course content, access and inclusion. Increased marketing at College A promoted the brand image of the college rather than the culture or identity and distracted from the academic values of the institution. The senior management at College A (and to some extent, College C) were willing marketers whereas the members of senior management and teaching staff at College B were more reluctant to adopt the language of promotion.

8.2.3 Students' motivation for learning

The students who were interviewed viewed education and human capital in much more personal terms as the means to secure employment. Engaging in lifelong learning at college was presented as the means to increase future economic prosperity and secure employment

and the students interviewed in this study adopted this agenda. Some students even suggested that there was no point in participating in a course of learning unless it led to employment, echoing the discourse of economic reductionism promoted by the Scottish Government where participation in lifelong learning is reduced to a pursuit wholly concerned with extrinsic value such as future economic prosperity, disregarding the intrinsic value of learning. Houle's (1961) typology, distinguishes between three types of adult learners: (1) activity-oriented learners, who participate because of social contacts and the pleasure of participation; (2) goal-oriented learners, who participate because of a certain indirect benefit – such as a degree or a better job; and (3) learning-oriented learners, who are driven by some intrinsic interest in their study subjects. The results of this study would place the vast majority of those interviewed in the category of goal-oriented learners who chose to participate in lifelong learning due to the perceived economic benefits it would provide. Many students had distinct career paths in mind before they began at college. This was particularly true in the case of students on manual, vocational courses whose progression routes were more limited than those students on more academic courses since they often did not include pathways to higher education. The students on more manual, vocational courses admitted that they also felt a certain degree of pressure to acquire the skills and qualifications they needed in order to gain employment. The danger here was that by promoting the economic benefits of lifelong learning and adopting many of the principles of human capital theory, the Scottish Government has placed increased responsibility on the individual, viewing lifelong learning as something which everyone can and *should* do in order to remain employable. Students on more academic courses stated that they did not feel under any pressure to participate but admitted that engaging in lifelong learning was essential in order to gain employment. They also felt that participation at college was something which they would return to at other points in their life in order to remain employable.

8.2.4 Colleges and social capital

Although the Scottish Government prioritised the development of human capital, the potential of colleges to foster social networks and contribute to social cohesion was not entirely forgotten, especially by the management at College B and the students interviewed. Colleges have been allocated the task of tackling many complex social problems (Coffield, 1999). The management of all three colleges believed that the most effective way of addressing problems of social exclusion was to develop the employability of the local population, leading to better health, increased financial income and greater social cohesion. However, whereas the management at Colleges A and C focused on increasing skills levels through access to higher education, the senior management of College B were more focused on promoting access at the lowest level, addressing unemployment in the local area and fostering a sense of community. According to Coleman, if too much emphasis is placed on accumulation of human capital and college education is promoted as an individual pursuit divorced from social context, then human capital will only rise to a certain point at the expense of social relationships and social capital (Coleman, 1966). High levels of social capital within a given society can help facilitate the generation and maintenance of human capital. Elements of social capital such as trust, prescribed social norms and reciprocity can help sustain and develop economic dynamism and government performance. According to Putnam (1993; 2000) civic engagement through college participation can help increase levels of social capital in a society by promoting trust and mutual co-operation. Connections made in college can function in a similar manner to connections in the workplace and colleges need to foster social capital in order to aid the generation and maintenance of human capital. The members of staff at Colleges A and C strongly identified with their individual vocational area

and saw their role as developing skills within this area. Although they recognised the importance of developing social capital, their focus was firmly on developing students' vocational skills. In contrast, College B's positioning as a community college affected the way in which the staff viewed their role. Staff members at College B recognised the importance of the college acting as a community resource and a locus for shared endeavour and were more accepting of their pastoral responsibilities. They felt that it was important to encourage the students to socialise in an effort to create a sense of trust and reciprocity within the local community. This appeared to be successful as students from College B were more inclined to identify with the whole college as opposed to their subject area. The students at College B also reported that they mixed with students on other courses to a greater degree than students at Colleges A and C who stated that they tended to remain on their own campus and interact with students on the same course.

8.2.5 The role of colleges in their local communities

Most of the students interviewed were drawn from the colleges' local community and chose to study at the college due to its proximity to their home. Despite Colleges A and C spending large sums of money to develop their campuses in order to attract international students (who often failed to materialise), the local college will always provide an attractive option for those within the immediate hinterland wishing to continue in education. Therefore, the attitudes and values of the local community can either nurture or erode positive attitudes towards lifelong learning. If the community places low value on formal education, then local ties can often take the place of college learning. This was recognised by the senior management of College B and became the central focus for the college's marketing material. The vast majority of the students interviewed stated that they were aware of a friend or family member who had

previously participated in further or higher education and this may have helped them make the decision to attend college. The students on more manual, vocational courses were more likely to state that knowing someone from their peer group who was also enrolled at college helped influence their decision to participate. They stated that they found it comforting to be surrounded by people of a similar age and background. However, this limited their potential for social engagement and affected the type of human and social capital generated by their course. The social networks they developed were confined to students of similar age and on similar courses. This contrasted with students on more academic courses who stated that the decision to engage in lifelong learning was solely theirs and they were less influenced by knowing others who studied at college.

Although the students clearly prioritised the economic function of college education, they also recognised the importance of widening their social networks, for example, through developing good relationships with their tutors and with fellow students. Participation at college was recognised as helping to build bridges and encouraged students to interact with people they would not otherwise come into contact with. The students felt that by entering the college they had developed the confidence to go on to do things they previously would not have considered possible. The students recognised that engaging in a course of learning at college could be a solitary pursuit if they were unable to bond with others in their group and they valued their relationships with their fellow students and the social skills they had developed as a result. This demonstrated that colleges were successful in generating both human and social capital, however indirectly, and that although the students' decision to attend college was based primarily on perceived economic benefits, they also valued the social benefits inherent in college learning. However, as noted by Putnam, it is important that the type of social capital developed encourages the building of new social networks, not

simply consolidating existing networks. For students on manual, vocational courses, the type of social capital developed appeared to be primarily of the bonding rather than the bridging variety, which could limit their future opportunities.

8.2.6 Learning environments within the colleges and the impact of subject area on the social interaction of students

The different learning environments within different course areas affected the learning experiences of the students. The experiences of the students differed greatly between those students on more manual, vocational courses such as engineering or motor vehicle repair, and those on more academic, classroom-based additions to the curriculum. This was particularly evident in Colleges A and C where different departments were situated in different campuses, sometimes to the extent of being located in separate towns. Students on more academic courses felt that their course would lead them to another course of education whilst those on more manual, vocational courses stated that they were doing a course in order to gain qualifications which would help them secure employment.

The relationships formed in these departments were also influenced by the learning culture of the department. Since these relationships were confined to specific departments these social interactions were built around the vocational areas in which the students studied. Although there were no discernible differences between males and females with regards to their motivations for attending college, there were clear differences between the environments in which they found themselves once enrolled at college, especially at Colleges A and C. Certain course areas were thought to be more suitable for males than females and vice-versa and this affected the students' choice of course. A proportion of the students admitted that

they felt under pressure to choose course areas which adhered to the norms and values of the local community thus restricting their employment options and resulting in traditional gender imbalances in particular course areas. Vocational areas such as engineering, manufacturing and motor vehicle repair were areas dominated by young males and tended to be based in different campuses (and in the case of Colleges A and C, separate towns) from areas such as business studies, information technology or hospitality which were more mixed in terms of student demographics resulting in campuses dominated by either young males or a mix of older learners and females. These divisions were less evident at College B which, by creating one main campus area, had succeeded in fostering a sense of community where the students were able to mingle more freely with students from other courses and often used the same common areas as opposed to the compartmentalised nature of the larger colleges.

The physical environments differed greatly between the departments and course areas and this could also affect the dispositions of the learners, leading to further segregation. These environments had been designed to mimic the workplace and were built around the course areas. Course areas which were traditionally dominated by young males tended to be based in sparsely decorated areas whereas areas which were dominated by females such as hair and beauty were decorated to mimic a beauty salon or nursery, reflecting the workplace environment. Students based in these traditional course areas developed social capital due to increased opportunities to interact but this was limited to 'bonding' social capital as the interaction was limited to people of a similar age and background rather than a wide range which would allow for 'bridging' social capital to develop.

8.2.7 The changing nature of the college population

As the policy analysis showed, the Scottish Government wants colleges to strengthen links with schools in order to reduce the number of young people becoming detached from the labour market (Scottish Executive, 2005b). Addressing those who are at risk of becoming part of The MCMC group is of vital importance to the Scottish Government. Research has shown that low levels of qualification have a detrimental impact on later participation in lifelong learning and that, as time passes, it becomes increasingly unlikely that this group will return to learning (Róbert, 2012). Those who leave school with few or no qualifications are likely to avoid returning to learning at a later stage in life because of their negative experience of initial schooling. Measures to address the MCMC group have focused on the type of learning experience they have at school, increasing vocational relevance through engagement with colleges in order to avoid them dropping out of the education system and thus require the Scottish Government to develop strategies to re-engage them at a later stage in life. *Skills for Scotland* highlights the importance of working with learners at an early age so that young people recognise the importance of developing their skills and equate further education with future success in the labour market (Scottish Government, 2007a). The Scottish Government views the skills which learners gain at college as more relevant to the workplace than the classroom and it was felt that students would recognise the relevance of what they were studying and this in turn would increase their motivation which may have diminished at school (Scottish Executive, 2004a).

It was clear that this had been approached differently by the three colleges. A finding of the research was the higher than average number of students under the age of 16 enrolled at College A. The senior management of the colleges admitted that the funding incentives which

they received for working with specific groups encouraged them to widen access to include students they would previously not have targeted. This was particularly the case for the senior management at College A who had vigorously pursued funding initiatives targeted at increasing the number of learners under the age of 16. Whereas college managers at College A had an exaggerated view of the potential of the college to attract international students, the reality was that much of their success depended on the inclusion of under-16s which made up a significant proportion (48 per cent) of the student population. This increase was due to willingness amongst the senior management to adopt Scottish Government policy concerning the inclusion of these students and pursue various funding initiatives from the SFC which aims to address those at risk of becoming part of the MCMC group before they leave school.

8.2.8 Lecturing staff's perspective on the inclusion of young learners

These younger students were regarded as an important part of the college but did not appear to fit in with the established college culture. Although many members of staff at College A were comfortable with the increasing numbers of learners under the age of 16, members of staff at Colleges B and C felt that these groups of students disrupted the learning of other students and were too young to fully appreciate the academic values of the college. Some members of staff felt that the financial incentives were insufficient to deal with the additional demands placed on lecturers. These staff members resented being custodians and some were critical of the senior management over the inclusion of these groups of students. The increase in students under the age of 16 challenged the established learning culture of the colleges and of the older students. Some members of staff felt that colleges were at risk of becoming extensions of the school environment and viewed this as a pragmatic measure to take the students out of school but keep them attached to the education system. Staff also felt that

their role was changing to include more pastoral responsibilities with many feeling as though they were expected to behave more like teachers than college staff. Some staff members expressed surprise at the number of students under the age of 16 they had to deal with on a day-to-day basis and stated that they had thought they would be working with adults with a desire to learn rather than learners of school age who they viewed as lacking the necessary maturity to take part in college education. The staff members recognised that there was more of an emphasis on providing access to younger groups of students and providing them with easier access at the lowest level. This was a source of contention amongst staff members with some feeling that this type of provision worked well in building up the skills and confidence of young learners, providing them with an opportunity that they would otherwise not have had, whereas other members of staff were of the opinion that the students were too young and lacking the necessary motivation and concentration to take part in learning at college.

Many of the youngest learners were seen as lacking distinct career path and some staff felt that this led them to opt for the simplest course rather than something which they actually wanted to pursue as a career. This was very different from older students who had a distinct career path in mind and this difference was probably due to their different life stages, with younger students further from the labour market. They also did not identify as strongly with their vocational area as older students. Some older learners expressed a belief that certain groups of younger learners could be disruptive, however, staff members from College A felt that it was essential to have a mix of age ranges as older students were very vocal about any disruptions to their learning and tended to keep the younger students in check.

8.3 Emerging themes in Scottish lifelong learning policy and practice

8.3.1 The role of human capital in Scottish lifelong learning policy and its impact on the colleges

This research has shown that human capital objectives are at the forefront of Scottish Government lifelong learning policy. In the mid 1990s, lifelong learning in Scotland was seen as the means of opening up educational opportunities to non-traditional learners. However, many now view lifelong learning as a necessary element for basic economic survival. Lifelong learning has famously been described as "human resource development in drag" (Boshier, 1998), driven by labour market requirements (Boeren et al, 2012, p 63). Writers such as Robertson (2009) have suggested that the focus on lifelong learning as a generator of human capital, which has characterised Scottish lifelong learning policy since the election of the SNP-led Scottish Government, reflects an ideological shift towards neoliberalism, with its emphasis on free markets and transnational production. In wider European policy, in contrast to the humanistic approach of the Faure report in the 1970s, lifelong learning is regarded 'primarily as a source of competitive advantage' (Field, 2006, p 17). The principal concern for the Scottish Government seems to be in maintaining economic competitiveness as manufacturing continues to decline and greater emphasis is placed on higher-value added production. This has led to an increased demand for colleges to provide higher-level skills and act as pathways to university. The expansion of tertiary education across Europe is driven by the fear that unless workers are educated to a higher level, the economies of Europe will be unable to compete with the burgeoning economies of countries such as China and Brazil. Colleges have become like the elite universities, engaged in marketing battles for the most highly qualified students. If colleges promote higher-level

provision at the expense of the lower end then there is a risk that colleges could function as systems of social reproduction where those who are already qualified participate in order to achieve further qualifications (Bourdieu, 1998).

As this research has shown, many learners view participation in lifelong learning in economic terms as the means to secure future employment. Vroom (1964), describes the motivation to take part in lifelong learning as the product of expectancy regarding the probability of future success and the value attached to the activity. The findings presented in Chapter 7 illustrate the importance students placed on future employment prospects and economic prosperity. Becker's (1964) work applied rational choice theory to the study of education. Individuals make the calculated decision to engage in further education due to the potential benefits they receive. However, participation in lifelong learning has come to be viewed as an economic necessity. Participating in lifelong learning was believed to instil the individual with a greater feeling of control over their own life (Warde and Tampubolon, 2002) but, as Sennet (2006) notes, the constant pressure to up-skill could result in a growing sense of fear and insecurity and a focus on human capital generation at the expense of generating social capital. The power of global markets has grown with politicians placing increasing emphasis on lifelong learning as one of the few policy levers available to governments to secure their country's economic survival (Riddell and Weedon, 2012). Scottish Government policy has placed increased value on lifelong learning as the avenue to future employment and increased levels of human capital, which leads to students viewing it in the same way. The intrinsic motivations for engaging in lifelong learning would appear to be less important (Schuller and Field, 1998). The students felt that engaging in lifelong learning was vital to their economic survival and thus attached great value to the need to gain increasingly higher levels of knowledge and skills in order to secure future employment (Boeren et al, 2012).

8.3.2 The role of social capital building in Scottish lifelong learning policy and practice

Human capital theory ignores the wider social context of learning (Schuller and Field, 1998) and is thus inadequate on its own to explain why people participate in lifelong learning and the benefits of participation. As noted by Riddell and Weedon, "education and lifelong learning have the potential to amplify or ameliorate inequality in economic, social and cultural domains" (Riddell and Weedon, 2012, p 9). Education and lifelong learning have long been thought of as playing a key role in Scottish society, allowing individuals to forge new identities for themselves through social mobility. Wilkinson (1996) and Wilkinson and Pickett (2009), have argued that more economically equal societies perform better on many measures including health, wellbeing and levels of violence. Therefore, achieving greater levels of social cohesion is in the interests of future economic prosperity. Trust and co-operation within a society increases levels of social capital, which in turn sustains and develops economic dynamism and government performance (Putnam, 1993). Learning environments such as colleges form as essential function as locations for shared activities, promoting inter-group trust and a sense of common citizenship, fostering social relationships and allowing people to increase their social networks (Putnam, 2000). In the current economic climate, the nurturing of social capital is increasingly important as rising prosperity is coupled with growing social exclusion, which is a threat to social stability (Riddell and Weedon, 2012). Lack of trust and reciprocity in a society can have a negative effect on equality and social cohesion, increasing the social distance between groups and reducing the sense of community within a given society (Green and Janmaat, 2011).

Scotland's colleges play a key role in providing access to education and training for socially marginalised groups. However, as this research has shown, there is a danger that colleges pursue economic targets at the expense of maintaining close ties with their local community and widening access to lifelong learning. Unequal access to lifelong learning has the potential to transmit and intensify inequality across generations (Bourdieu, 1988). In order to tackle issues of social equality, many theorists have acknowledged the need for government and college policy to pay attention to economic injustices, associated with the politics of social class, and to cultural injustices, associated with the politics of identity, in order to ensure equal access to lifelong learning opportunities (Young, 1990; Fraser, 1997). As discussed above, the benefit of participation in lifelong learning may vary between individuals with those who already possess a high level of qualification participating in additional training in order to further increase their financial prospects and more limited prospects available to those in socially marginalised groups. As this research has shown, some courses present limited opportunities for social engagement as individuals are likely to develop bonding, rather than bridging, social capital (Riddell et al., 2001). Colleges spread over several campuses segregate learners to such an extent that they very rarely interact with anyone other than those on similar courses. Although this may not present an obstacle for those on more academic, classroom based courses which are composed of various age groups and genders, some course areas are dominated by young men or women and thus limit the potential for bridging social capital. It is essential that learners are given the opportunity to widen their social networks through engagement in lifelong learning (Putnam, 2000).

8.3.3 The benefits and barriers to participation

Riddell and Weedon state "an individual's decision to participate in adult learning is not simply a reflection of their individual motivation, but also of the social and economic structures which frame their lives" (Riddell and Weedon, 2012, p 13). The decision to engage in lifelong learning is strongly linked to the individual's social environment, including the attitudes of family and friends (Coleman, 1966). This was certainly the case for those students interviewed who reported that issues such as transport, funding and social connections all influenced their decision to attend college. In addition to the economic motivations mentioned earlier, it is also important for the students to feel a sense of belonging within their local community and wider society, particularly for older learners who may be returning to education after a period of time. A recent Europe-wide study of lifelong learning found that "intrinsic motivation was important in all countries and to learners at all levels, suggesting that economic instrumentalism is very far from the sole, or even the main, driver of the decision to participate in adult education" (Riddell, 2012, p. 152). For specific social groups, such as the high proportion of immigrants at College B, the provision of lifelong learning opportunities is particularly important partly because of the need to gain qualifications for particular jobs, but also to establish social connections within a new environment. The findings of this research point to the inadequacy of human capital theories in fully explaining the motivation of learners at Scotland's colleges, since such theories place undue emphasis on rational economic planning, which offers at best only a partial explanation of motivation" (Riddell, 2012, p 152).

Initiatives aimed at social justice need to take account of the barriers faced by particular social groups. Scottish Government policy on lifelong learning places the responsibility to

engage in lifelong learning on the shoulders of the individual (Scottish Government, 2008a). However, individuals may not possess the power to overcome the barriers to participation (Coffield, 1999). According to Rubenson and Desjardins' (2009) Bounded Agency Model, the decision to participate in lifelong learning is a result of interactions between different 'agents' and thus goes beyond the individual responsibility of the learner (Boeren et al, 2012, p 65). According to Rubenson and Desjardins, policy measures to widen access should try to overcome structural and institutional barriers with individuals constantly informed about the learning opportunities available in their region. These individuals in turn, need to identify their own learning needs so that their feedback can be used to refine the educational provision and support. As a result, not all adults possess the capability to overcome the barriers to education and it is essential that this is taken into account. Rubenson and Schuetze (2000) also expressed concern that not all adults have the competencies required to find their own way in lifelong learning. If the Scottish Government's objective is to increase participation at all levels among all sections of the Scottish population, they need to ensure that the information and guidance offered is as accessible as it is intended to be (Scottish Government, 2007a, p 39). If this does not happen then the inequality between those who are highly qualified and those who lack any formal qualifications will widen rather than narrow.

As noted by Sennett (2006) globalisation has had a profound effect on how individuals identify with the labour market. Lifelong learning policy expects them to engage in an on-going process of up-skilling in order to secure on-going employment, creating what Riddell and Weedon describe as "a permanent sense of insecurity and alienation" (Riddell and Weedon, 2012, p 3). Those who do not keep up with the requirements of the rapidly changing labour markets are likely to find themselves excluded both socially and economically. Whilst the new global economy generates great prosperity for some; "it also intensifies the social

and economic exclusion of continents, countries, regions, localities and social groups" (Riddell and Weedon, 2012, p 3). Authors such as Beck (1992, 2000) have suggested that the new global economy provides individuals with the opportunity to exercise a much greater degree of individual autonomy, weakening traditional identities associated with areas of work. However, as this research shows, there remain traditional gender divisions as well as a great variation in attitudes towards widening access across vocational areas. These roles are deeply rooted in local communities. At the same time, those at the social margins may experience a deep sense of insecurity due to the uncertainty surrounding rapid labour market change.

8.3.4 The impact of the recession on the college sector

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, what Stiglitz (2010) describes as a result of the philosophy of neoliberalism, where the financial services industry was allowed to develop in a largely unregulated fashion, led to massive defaults and the near collapse of the global economy in 2008. Governments across Europe then committed large sums of public money in order to bail out the faltering banks which resulted in the banking crisis becoming a "sovereign debt crisis" (Riddell and Weedon, 2012, p 3). The on-going financial crisis raises further questions surrounding the Scottish Government's priorities regarding lifelong learning and to what extent non-economic themes such as social inclusion, social cohesion and citizenship are genuine priorities in this time of austerity (Holford and Špolar, 2012). It is likely that this period will see a reduction in funding for Scotland's college sector along with other forms of publicly funded education and training. Questions also arise regarding the future challenges facing colleges, such as College B, which choose to forge an individual identity and focus on the needs of their local community. The survival of lifelong learning as

a force for building social cohesion, promoting social mobility and contributing to the task of economic rebuilding is also in doubt (Riddell, 2012, p 151).

Rizvi and Lingard have argued that over the past three decades there has been an "almost universal shift from social demographic to neoliberal orientations in thinking about educational purposes and governance resulting in policies of corporatization, privatization and commercialization on the one hand, and on greater demand for accountability on the other" (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010, p 85). This is evident in the findings of the Griggs Review (discussed in Chapter 1, p 13), which stresses the importance of a more structured system of governance across the Scottish college sector, calling for a regional model and further mergers (Griggs, 2012). Efficiency is regarded as a meta-value which subsumes social equality, mobility and social cohesion. In the wake of the on-going financial crisis, there is a danger that college boards will abandon the widening access agenda, allowing market forces to determine the future direction of the college as opposed to the needs of the immediate locality. This will have a dramatic impact on the college sector, especially those who try to steer slightly different paths and try to retain a focus on social inclusion and social capital building. As this research has shown, colleges such as A and C have continued to grow in size, adopting business strategies and pursuing multiple revenue streams in order to survive in a crowded marketplace. However, this has come at the cost of their individual identity and the senior management of these colleges have turned to branding and marketing in efforts to manufacture a new identity for the college One of the central debates within the literature on the influence of globalisation on educational policy concerns the extent to which there is a growing trend towards the homogenisation of national cultures, reflected within national systems of education and lifelong learning, including the plans for further mergers across the Scottish college sector (Green et al, 2007). The programme of mergers has also resulted in a

great deal of uncertainty, throwing the college sector into what has been described as "the turmoil of wholesale reorganisation" (President of the EIS Further Education Lecturers Association, June 2012). The report from the Joint Future Thinking Taskforce on Universities: *New Horizons: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century*, was published in 2008 with the aim of increasing sustainable economic growth in Scotland. This report stated that arguments are often advanced that Scotland should have fewer universities, with mergers between different universities believed to be the most suitable alternative. However, the task force found that 'there is no convincing argument that mergers deliver cost significant savings' (Scottish Government, 2008c, p 19). However, there is already a tradition of college mergers in Scotland, with smaller institutions being subsumed into larger ones, often at the cost of the smaller college's ethos and culture. It is likely that this trend will continue in the future following Russel Griggs' Review. The Scottish Government has chosen to delay its decision on a number of recommendations made in the Griggs Review, leaving the college sector with an uncertain future. The education secretary has confirmed that, despite Griggs recommending that each region should have one college, there would be flexibility allowing for multi-college regions where necessary, resulting in two types of regions. (TESS, 20th July 2012). The appointment of the thirteen regional chairs has also attracted criticism due to being hand-picked by the education secretary. Some in the FE sector have condemned the level of ministerial control which has been exerted over the decision to appoint these chairs (described as 'regional leads' by the government (www.scotland.gov.uk). College funding will also be allocated to regions rather than individual colleges and the regional chairs will be instrumental in distributing the region's money. At the time this research was undertaken, further college mergers appeared to be inevitable. This raises questions as to the extent individual colleges are able to reconcile their own institutional identity and culture with government policy. Colleges A and C, having

already undergone a merger and emerged as economically-centric institutions focused on funding targets and performance indicators, are likely to be less affected by future mergers than College B, which may have to pursue more economic targets if it is to survive. The staff members interviewed in this research described the merger process as a painful one, with many concerned about a loss of community focus, identity and redundancies. It is likely that further mergers across the sector will result in similar concerns and further loss of identity and culture.

The current economic crisis has seen an increased emphasis on the marketization of post-compulsory education, particularly in England, and a large reduction in state subsidy particularly for the arts and social sciences. The Browne Review also recommended that careers advice was in need of a radical overhaul, highlighting the importance of individuals making the 'correct choice' of a course of education which results in a higher paid job, allowing the graduate to 'add to the nation's strength in the global knowledge-based economy' (Browne, 2010, p 2). Although the Scottish Government has always ruled out the concept of up-front fees for higher education, recent policies in England have prompted the Scottish Government to consider different ways to bring more funding into the sector. The Scottish Government produced the document, *Building A Smarter Future: Towards a Sustainable Scottish Solution for the Future of Higher Education*, in 2010 in response to the Browne Review. This paper presents the Scottish Government's reaction to the radical changes in the funding regime south of the border. The Browne Report recommended that the responsibility for supporting higher education should be shifted from the public purse to the graduate. The Scottish Government stated that it intended that the state would continue to support higher education, but the policy document *Building A Smarter Future* presented several funding options in order to generate additional income. These options included the

possibility of a graduate contribution, a policy which is identical to the English approach (Scottish Government, 2010c). Despite their condemnation of similar moves in England, this demonstrates that the Scottish Government is seriously considering the possibility that students will have to contribute to the cost of their courses after they graduate.

What these policies will mean for the college sector is uncertain, but with a large reduction in the Scottish block grant from Westminster, it is already likely that colleges are feeling the pressure in terms of increasing the productivity and economic efficiency, resulting in possible job losses. The Scottish Government is committed to maintaining student numbers in the further education sector but this has not been achieved, with statistics from the SFC showing falling numbers of students resulting in staff losing their jobs and courses being cut (www.sfc.ac.uk, 2012). Government figures report that over 1800 staff could lose their jobs in the year 2012/13 as a result of cuts. According to the Educational Institute of Scotland (Scotland's largest education trade union), factoring in inflation, the real-terms cut to college budgets will amount to approximately 36% over four years (www.eis.org.uk, 2012). Cuts to courses means that the range of opportunities available to learners will narrow. Colleges such as College B, which focus on social inclusion and social capital building, are likely to struggle to retain their institutional identity in this time of austerity.

All of these measures suggest a reduction in the importance of the widening access agenda and a retreat from the view of colleges as generators of social capital, particularly in poorer communities. The emphasis for the future may lie even more in the development of high level skills, with a particular emphasis on growing jobs in the private sector as demonstrated in the Skills for Scotland update, *Accelerating the Recovery and Increasing Sustainable Economic Growth* (Scottish Government, 2010c). Students are likely to have to pay a much larger

contribution to the cost of their course, which will result in an even greater focus on its potential economic payback. It is clear from these findings that, at a time of economic crisis, the Scottish Government is pulling back from the widening access/social capital building agenda and is focusing on a narrowly defined human capital agenda prioritising economic objectives.

8.4 Conclusion

In answer to the main research question, Scottish Government policy in relation to Scotland's colleges prioritises economic objectives over social objectives.

There has been a general shift to the right in the political complexion of governments across Europe including Scotland. The neoliberal agenda of free trade, free movement of labour and deregulation has resulted in significant cuts to the college sector and restricted opportunities for social equality and cohesion (Riddell, 2012). Economic discourse is dominant in Scottish lifelong learning policy and the main focus of the teaching and learning in the college sector is in creating a highly-skilled, economically productive workforce. Investing in education and training through college education is viewed as the best way for Scotland to increase its stocks of human capital and maintain economic competitiveness.

What this research shows is that the economic agenda apparent in Scottish lifelong learning policy is mediated differently in different colleges as a result of their history, mission and geographic location. Where government priorities align with the mission of the college, staff members are more willing to accept them. This was evident in the difference between the larger colleges of A and C (the result of recent mergers) which were more focused on

economic objectives such as achieving funding targets and performance indicators, and the smaller, more-community-focused College B which prioritised social inclusion and providing access to provision at the lowest end. Although the Scottish Government has charged the college sector with fostering social inclusion and cohesion as well as contributing to the economy, the findings of this study show that with the exception of College B, the lifelong learning on offer at Scotland's colleges is often perceived in a narrow, economistic sense, where the accumulation of skills and qualifications is paramount and the development of social cohesion and social capital is treated as a by-product. Lifelong learning in colleges thus reflects Levitas' (1998) social integrationist discourse, where social inclusion is envisaged as being achieved through participation in employment. This message is communicated through the senior management of the colleges which market the college as the route to employment, equipping individuals with skills and qualifications that relate directly to the labour market. The colleges emphasise these economic objectives in their institutional ethos alongside their individual ambitions to become international centres for learning. This had resulted in an in-built tension between the economic and international focus of the college principals and senior management and the more vocationally focused identity of the members of staff. However, it should be noted that this tension was most pronounced in Colleges A and C. In College B, the values of lecturers and managers were more clearly aligned, with the focus on employment coupled with a desire to reach out to those who were at a distance from the labour market.

When they were first established, colleges in Scotland catered for the employment needs of their local community. As a result, they each developed a distinct identity in relation to their history, mission and geographic location. However, as a result of numerous mergers and increasing influence of marketisation, some colleges have struggled to reconcile their

institutional history and culture with government policy, instead relying on marketing to promote a brand image rather than an academic identity. By focusing on economic priorities, Colleges A and C had lost their community focus whereas College B was able to retain a sense of identity. The uncertain future facing the college sector in the wake of the Griggs Review means that colleges may be unable to hold on to their institutional identity, resulting in large, homogenous institutions which focus on national, rather than local, priorities.

Government policy on educating young students was another area of contrast between the three colleges. The senior management at College A had vigorously pursued funding initiatives to work with younger learners, resulting in a much higher proportion of under 16s compared to Colleges B and C. Although the senior managers at College A were keen to promote the college as an international centre for education, the increase in the number of learners under the age of 16 has been responsible for much of the college's recent success in attracting greater numbers of students to the college (see figures 12 and 13, pp. 196-197). These under 16 students did not fit in with the established culture of the colleges. Staff members were often critical of their inclusion and some older learners thought them to be disruptive and lacking the necessary maturity. However, some staff members whose perception of lifelong learning as a route to employment matched the government's, recognised that the increased vocational relevance of college courses was something which would appeal to these young learners and that it was important the college make efforts to include them.

The students interviewed valued the vocational relevance of college education and based their decision to enrol at college on the potential economic benefits they would experience. They also valued the social relationships they built whilst at college, illustrating the complex

relationship between human and social capital. Although the students stated that they enjoyed learning at college due to its vocational relevance, it was clear that the social relationships were of equal importance to the success of college provision. The students therefore perceived education in terms of its economic benefits, equating college learning with future economic prosperity. However, the college sector's function as a location for social capital generation is of vital importance to the Scottish Government's aspirations for future economic prosperity. Students' social interactions were confined to particular subject areas or campuses which restricted the types of social and human capital developed within. According to Putnam, it is in the government's interest to foster co-operation and trust in society as this in turn will help to develop a more trusting relationship between society and the government (Putnam, 1993). It is essential therefore, that the distinction is made between bonding social capital which can be exclusive, and bridging social capital which is outward-looking and inclusive. Particularly for less qualified learners, the colleges were possibly paying insufficient attention to the need to widen social and educational horizons. The result of the focus on the economic agenda means that some people will be assisted in entering the labour market. However, the potential of college learning to replenish stores of social capital might be lost.

The students recognised the importance of widening their social networks and believed that college was the ideal place to do this. Human capital theory cannot solely be used to explain the motivation to participate in lifelong learning, therefore the dominance of human capital theory in the Scottish Government's lifelong learning policy is flawed and does not accurately reflect the tensions between human and social capital. The decision to participate in lifelong learning is influenced by the individuals' social environment. Recent policy places the responsibility for remaining employable on the individual, but not all individuals possess

the capability to overcome the barriers to participation. Future policy needs to take this interaction into account and acknowledge that, rather than being seen as academic liberation, the pressures to engage in a constant process of up-skilling can result in a growing sense of fear and insecurity amongst many (Sennett, 2006).

As noted by Green et al. (2006)

> *Social capital theory argues that individuals who associate more with others tend also to be more tolerant, more trusting in other people and institutions, give more to charity and be more politically engaged (Green et al., 2006, p 176).*

Failure to realise the social capital building potential of college learning therefore entails a major loss both for the individual student and the wider society. This research has shown if efforts to achieve economic prosperity and social equality and cohesion can be aligned, then participation at college could contribute to more a prosperous and equal society.

9. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this research mostly lie with the limited sample of staff members included in the case studies. As discussed in the section on missing data in Chapter 4, most of the staff included in the fieldwork came from senior or middle management, this was due to the difficulties in arranging interviews with members of lecturing staff who had teaching commitments during the time these interviews took place. Whilst efforts were made to include members of lecturing support/staff, the smaller proportion of these staff members and the lack of student support staff from College A is acknowledged as a limitation.

The sampling of students was also problematic. Difficulties in arranging focus groups with students meant that marginalised groups such as disabled students, asylum seekers and students with learning difficulties were not represented in the focus groups. Learners on non-certificated community learning were also not included as this was beyond the scope of this research. A more representative sample would have contained more learners from the 25-59 age group, however, due to the way in which focus groups were arranged (described in Chapter 4) it was not possible to select a more representative sample.

10. AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As this research was based on a small sample of three colleges, further work could extend the size of the project to include more colleges across different areas of Scotland. This would allow for greater comparison between the different client bases and the different geographical areas of Scotland. It would also allow for greater differences to be drawn out between the colleges.

The sampling of the students could also be widened to include students from marginalised groups such as disabled students, asylum seekers and students with learning difficulties. Learners on non-certificated community learning courses could be included. As only a small proportion of the students interviewed were classed as international students, this is another group which could be included in further study.

Further research could be conducted with the under-16 age group. To what extent is college education the answer for this group and is it a suitable alternative to staying on at school? Who is in fact benefitting from their inclusion and is it merely a form of covert exclusion from school?

The policy options detailed in the previous chapter were announced after this research was conducted. Another area for future research would be to explore the ways in which proposed funding cuts and further mergers have impacted upon students and staff members at the colleges and whether they have noticed any changes to the college ethos or curriculum. Periods of economic recession often result in increased numbers of enrolments at colleges as

people return to education in order to re-train. Further research could explore the how the colleges respond to growing numbers of students whilst dealing with dwindling resources.

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12. APPENDICES

Appendix A

Examples of interview schedules for various levels of staff

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR STAFF AT COLLEGE C

SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Preamble

These interviews are part of a PhD research project entitled 'The Role of Scotland's Colleges: Balancing Economic and Social Objectives'. It also forms part of a wider European project. This research will explore the role Scottish colleges play in the development of economic and social objectives, and the tensions between these two goals.

The College and your role within the College

- Can you tell me a little bit about your role within the college and how long you have been in your current post?
- Do you feel that the merger of the colleges has resulted in College C achieving a significantly greater profile, both locally and nationally? How important do you feel this is?
- The college's strategic plan outlines the college's strategic objectives. What are the college's key priorities for the next few years?
    - Is the current economic crisis likely to have an impact on these key priorities?
- When the college was established in 2005, did the key priorities differ significantly from the previous institutions?
- When the new organisational structure was put in place, were there any initial problems?
- The percentage of full-time staff with a teaching qualification has risen from 71% in 2005-06 to 94% in 2006-07, this was against a national average of 91% in 2006-07. Was this supported by Government initiatives?

The student profile of the College

- How would you describe the student profile of the college?
- Has the student profile changed in the time you have been at the college?
- Do you see a difference between groups of students who were traditionally involved in FE and new groups of students who were perhaps not the traditional targets for FE colleges?
- Has there been an increase in non-traditional student groups?
- How does the college promote social interaction among its student population?

Recruitment

- What measures are in place to attract potential students?
- Are these aimed at attracting any particular groups?

Widening access to Education?

- What measures are currently in place to widen access to disadvantaged groups?
- The average percentage of students from deprived postcode areas made up 29% of all FE activity and 23% of all HE activity in Scotland's colleges. In College C they make up 17% of FE and 14% of HE activity. Is the new development, situated in an area of high social deprivation, an attempt to incorporate wider areas of deprivation, why do you think this is important?
- Do you feel that the courses currently on offer are about getting non-traditional students onto mainstream courses or are they steered towards separate programmes?
- Does the college have a strategy regarding the 'More Choices More Chances' group?
- Does the college have a strategy regarding unemployed adults?
- How effective are access courses (SWAP) in bringing in students who would not have been able to participate previously?
- What in your view are the main factors which would influence the success of widening access?
- Do you feel there are tensions between widening access and the college's need to ensure financial stability/balance the books?

The Courses on offer within the College

- In 2006-07, the subject areas with the greatest level of student activity were Family Care/Personal Development/Personal Care and Appearance (Care) and Engineering.
    - What has led to this?
    - Do you feel that this is likely to change in the near future?
- College C claims to meet regional needs by providing courses in science, engineering and technology. How have the courses on offer changed in the time you have been at the college?
- Do you think that some courses prioritise skills development whilst others are mainly for the purpose of social interaction?
- Which courses have been successful in drawing in disadvantaged groups?
- Do you feel that the college can support a high value experience for day or block release students? Are there any issues that affect these learners as opposed to full-time learners?

Student Support

- How do you help students prepare for their course?
- What other kind of student support is on offer?
- What support is available for students who are on courses
- Who encourages students when they appear to be struggling?
    - Is this support on a one-to-one basis or in particular groups?

The Local Community

- Since its formation, College C has been gradually acquiring a regional identity. How do you feel this has developed in recent years and do you feel that this has strengthened the position of the college with regards to contributing to and influencing area-wide policy/developments
- College C has to cater for a diverse region that contains industrial areas as well as rural areas, how does the college work with these local communities?
- The population in the region has expanded rapidly in recent years. Will this impact on the college with regards to the age groups etc of students?

Local Businesses

- Are some courses specifically geared towards working with particular employers? How does the funding for this work?
- Are there any plans to address the problem of low training spend by employers through colleges?
- The College's strategic plan has a strong focus on community planning. How was this developed? Was it in partnership with local businesses?
- Is there representation for local businesses on the college's board of governors?

Funding Issues

- Grant-in-aid from the SFC accounted for 70% of the college's revenue budget for 2006-07. What are the other main funding streams for the college?
- Does the funding the college receives influence the courses on offer by tending to favour particular course areas?
- Are there any particular support mechanisms/budgets for supporting low-income students?

Government Policy

- What do you think is the main focus of the Scottish Government with regards to FE Colleges?
- Do you think that this has changed in recent years?
- Do you feel that the government provides incentives for colleges to widen access to disadvantaged groups?
- Do you feel that the government acknowledges the contribution of Scotland's colleges to workforce education, training and development?
- Drawing on your experience, how would you advise the Scottish Government regarding widening access?
- Do you anticipate any changes to the government's strategy for lifelong learning in the future?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR STAFF AT COLLEGE C

HEADS OF TEACHING DEPARTMENTS

Preamble

These interviews are part of a PhD research project entitled 'The Role of Scotland's Colleges: Balancing Economic and Social Objectives'. It also forms part of a wider European project. This research will explore the role Scottish colleges play in the development of economic and social objectives, and the tensions between these two goals.

The College and your role within the College

- Can you tell me a little bit about your role within the college and how long you have been in your current post?
- Do you feel that the merger has resulted in College C achieving a significantly greater profile, both locally and nationally? How important do you feel this is?
- The college's strategic plan outlines the college's strategic objectives. What are the college's key priorities for the next few years?
    - Do you think the current economic crisis will have an effect on these?
    - Does this differ in any way from your individual teaching aims and duties?
- When the college was established in 2005, did the key priorities of the College differ significantly from the previous institutions?
- When the new organisational structure was put in place, were there any initial problems?
- The percentage of full-time staff with a teaching qualification has risen from 71% in 2005-06 to 94% in 2006-07, this was against a national average of 91% in 2006-07. How did this affect your department? (what were the main benefits, any disadvantages?)

The student profile of the College

- How would you describe the student profile of the college?
    - Has the student profile changed in the time you have been at the college?
- Do you see a difference between groups of students who were traditionally involved in FE and new groups of students who were perhaps not the traditional targets for FE colleges?
    - How would you describe these students? (mainly young, older etc.).
- Has there has been an increase in non-traditional student groups?
- How does the college promote social interaction among its student population e.g. through social activities, student union, student societies?

Recruitment

- What measures are in place to attract potential students?
- Are these aimed at attracting any particular groups? For example, the More Choices, More Chances group or older learners?

Widening access to Education

- What measures are currently in place to widen access to disadvantaged groups?
- The average percentage of students from deprived postcode areas made up 29% of all FE activity and 23% of all HE activity in Scotland's colleges. In the college they make up 17% of FE and 14% of HE activity. Are recent developments, situated in areas of high social deprivation, attempts to incorporate wider areas of deprivation, why do you think this is important?
    - Are there any other similar plans to incorporate wider areas of deprivation?
- Do you feel that the courses currently on offer are about getting non-traditional students onto mainstream courses or are they steered towards separate programmes?
    - Could you please provide some examples?
- Does your teaching department have a strategy regarding the 'More Choices More Chances' group, formerly called the NEET group?
- Does your teaching department have a strategy regarding unemployed adults?
- How effective are access courses (SWAP) in bringing in students who would not have been able to participate previously?
- What in your view are the main factors which would influence the success of widening access schemes?
- Do you feel there are tensions between widening access and the college's need to ensure financial stability/balance the books?

The Courses on offer within the College

- In 2006-07, the subject areas with the greatest level of student activity were Family Care/Personal Development/Personal Care and Appearance (Care) and Engineering.
    - What do you feel has led to this?
    - Do you think this might change in the near future?
- College C claims to meet regional needs by providing courses in science, engineering and technology. How have the courses on offer changed in the time you have been at the college?
    - If so, do you have any examples?
- Do you think that some courses prioritise skills development whilst others are mainly for the purpose of social interaction?
- Which courses have been successful in drawing in disadvantaged groups?
- Do you feel that the college can support a high value experience for day or block release students? Are there any issues that affect these learners as opposed to full-time learners?
    - If so, what are the difficulties?

Student Support

- How does the college help students prepare for their course?
- What other kind of student support is on offer?
- What support is available for current students who are on courses
- Who encourages students when they appear to be struggling?
    - Who identifies if a student is in need of support?
    - Is this support on a one-to-one basis or in particular groups?

The Local Community

- Since its formation in 2005, College C has been gradually acquiring a regional identity. How do you feel this has developed in recent years and do you feel that this has strengthened the position of the college with regards to contributing to and influencing area-wide policy/developments
- College C has to cater for a diverse region that contains industrial areas as well as rural areas, how does the college work with these different types of local communities?
- The population in the region has expanded rapidly in recent years, how do you think this will impact on the college with regards to the age groups etc of students?

Local Businesses

- Are some courses specifically geared towards working with particular employers? How does the funding for this work?
- How does the college plan to address the problem of low training spend by employers through colleges?
- The College C strategic plan (dated 2006) has a strong focus on community planning. How was this developed?
    - Was it developed in partnership with local businesses?
- Is there representation for local businesses on the college's board of governors?

Funding Issues

- Grant-in-aid from the SFC accounted for 70% of the college's revenue budget for 2006-07. What are the other main funding streams for the college?
- Does the funding the college receives influence the courses on offer by tending to favour particular course areas?
- What other issues are there surrounding funding issues for your subject department?
- Are there any particular support mechanisms/budgets for supporting low-income students?

Government Policy

- What do you think is the main focus of the Scottish Government with regards to FE Colleges?
- Do you think that this has changed in recent years?
- Do you feel that the government provides incentives for colleges to widen access to disadvantaged groups?
- Do you feel that the government acknowledges the contribution of Scotland's colleges to workforce education, training and development?
- Drawing on your experience, how would you advise the Scottish Government regarding widening access?
- Do you anticipate any changes to the government's strategy for lifelong learning in the future?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR STAFF AT COLLEGE C

LECTURERS

Preamble

These interviews are part of a PhD research project entitled 'The Role of Scotland's Colleges: Balancing Economic and Social Objectives'. It also forms part of a wider European project. This research will explore the role Scottish colleges play in the development of economic and social objectives, and the tensions between these two goals.

The College and your role within the College

- Can you tell me a little bit about your role within the college and how long you have been in your current post?
- Do you feel that the merger of the previous colleges has resulted in College C achieving a significantly greater profile, both locally and nationally? How important do you feel this is?
- The college's strategic plan outlines the college's strategic objectives. Are you aware of what the college's key priorities are for the next few years?
    - Do you think the current economic crisis will have an effect on these?
    - Does this differ in any way from your individual teaching aims?
- When the college was established in 2005, do you know if the key priorities of College C differed significantly from the previous institutions?
- When the new organisational structure was put in place, were you aware of any initial problems?
- How do you feel the further education sector is seen by those out-with the sector?
- The percentage of full-time staff with a teaching qualification has risen from 71% in 2005-06 to 94% in 2006-07, this was against a national average of 91% in 2006-07. Did this affect you in any way?
    - If yes, how?
- Are you aware of any particular measures to monitor equality levels among staff members? (e.g. through ensuring gender equality in promotion ..)

The student profile of the College

- How would you describe the student profile of the college?
    - Has this changed in the time you have been at the college?
    - Does this match the profile of the courses you teach on?
- Do you see a difference between groups of students who were traditionally involved in FE and new groups of students who were perhaps not the traditional targets for FE colleges?
    - How would you describe these students? (mainly young, older, etc).
- Has there has been an increase in non-traditional student groups?
- Do you think that the college actively recruits some groups of students more than others?

- How does the college promote social interaction among its student population e.g. through social activities, student union, student societies?
- Do you see your role as mainly equipping the learners with vocational skills, social skills, or a mixture of both?
- Do you feel that it is important to have a relationship with your students, which is different from the relationships they had with their school teachers?
- What other skills do you think the students value most in college lecturers?

Widening access to Education?

- Are you aware of any measures the college takes to widen access to disadvantaged groups?
- The average percentage of students from deprived postcode areas made up 29% of all FE activity and 23% of all HE activity in Scotland's colleges. In College C they make up 17% of FE and 14% of HE activity. Recent developments, situated in areas of high social deprivation, are an attempt to incorporate wider areas of deprivation, do you think this is important?
    - Are you aware of any other similar plans to incorporate wider areas of deprivation?
- Do you feel that the courses currently on offer are about getting non-traditional students onto mainstream courses or on separate programmes?
    - Could you please provide some examples/
- How effective are access courses (SWAP) in bringing in students who would not have been able to participate previously?
- What in your view are the main factors which would influence the success of the college's widening access schemes?
- What, in your opinion, are the tensions between widening access and the college's need to generate revenue?
- Do you feel there are tensions between widening access and the college's need to ensure financial stability/balance the books?

The Courses on offer within the College

- In 2006-07, the subject areas with the greatest level of student activity were Family Care/Personal Development/Personal Care and Appearance (Care) and Engineering.
    - What do you feel has led to this?
    - Do you think this might change in the near future?
    - What impact does it have on you as a lecturer?
- College C claims to meet regional needs by providing courses in science, engineering and technology. How have the courses on offer changed in the time you have been at the college *or* Has this impacted on your workload or on your work in any other way?
- Do you think that some courses prioritise skills development whilst others are mainly for the purpose of social interaction?
    - If so, do you have any examples?
- Have any of the courses you are involved with been successful in drawing in disadvantaged groups?
- Do you feel that the college can support a high value experience for day or block release students? Are there any issues that affect these learners as opposed to full-time learners?

    - If so, what are the difficulties?

Student Support

- How does the college help students prepare for their course?
- What other kind of student support is on offer?
- What support is available for students who are on courses
- Who encourages students when they appear to be struggling?
    - Who identifies if a student is in need of support?
    - Is this support on a one-to-one basis or in particular groups?

The Local Community

- Since its formation in 2005, College C has been gradually acquiring a regional identity. How do you feel this has developed in recent years and do you feel that this has strengthened the position of the college with regards to contributing to and influencing area-wide policy/developments
- The population in the region has expanded rapidly in recent years, how do you think this will impact on the courses you teach with regards to the age groups etc of students?

Local Businesses (with regards to your particular department/job)

- Are some courses specifically geared towards working with particular employers? How does this work with regards to funding?
- Do you feel that there is a problem of low training spend by employers through colleges?

Funding Issues

- Do you think the funding the college receives influence the courses on offer by tending to favour particular course areas?
- What other issues are there surrounding funding issues for your subject department?

Government Policy

- What do you think is the main focus of the Scottish Government with regards to FE Colleges?
- Do you think that this has changed in recent years?
- Do you feel that the government provides incentives for colleges to widen access to disadvantaged groups?
- Do you feel that the government acknowledges the contribution of Scotland's colleges to workforce education, training and development?
- Drawing on your experience, how would you advise the Scottish Government regarding widening access?
- Do you anticipate any changes to the government's strategy for lifelong learning in the future?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR STAFF AT COLLEGE C

STUDENT SERVICES

Preamble

These interviews are part of a PhD research project entitled 'The Role of Scotland's Colleges: Balancing Economic and Social Objectives'. It also forms part of a wider European project. This research will explore the role Scottish colleges play in the development of economic and social objectives, and the tensions between these two goals.

The College and your role within the College

- Can you tell me a little bit about your role within the college and how long you have been in your current post?
- Do you feel that the merger of the previous colleges has resulted in College C achieving a significantly greater profile, both locally and nationally? How important do you feel this is?
- The college's strategic plan outlines the college's strategic objectives. What are the college's key priorities for the next few years?
    - Do you think the current economic crisis will have an effect on these?
    - Does this differ in any way from your individual teaching aims?
- When the college was established in 2005, did the key priorities of College C differ significantly from the previous institutions?
- When the new organisational structure was put in place, were there any initial problems?
- How do you feel the further education sector is seen by those out-with the sector?
- The percentage of full-time staff with a teaching qualification has risen from 71% in 2005-06 to 94% in 2006-07, this was against a national average of 91% in 2006-07. Did this affect you in any way?
- Are you aware of any particular measures to monitor staff equality? (e.g. with regards to race equality, gender equality…)

The student profile of the College

- How would you describe the student profile of the college?
    - Has this changed in the time you have been at the college?
- Do you see a difference between groups of students who were traditionally involved in FE and new groups of students who were perhaps not the traditional targets for FE colleges?
    - How would you describe these students? (mainly young, older etc.).
- Has there has been an increase in non-traditional student groups?
- How does the college promote social interaction among its student population e.g. through social activities, student union, student societies?

Widening access to Education

- Are you aware of any measures the college takes to widen access to disadvantaged groups?
- The average percentage of students from deprived postcode areas made up 29% of all FE activity and 23% of all HE activity in Scotland's colleges. In College C they make up 17% of FE and 14% of HE activity. Recent developments, situated in area of high social deprivation, are an attempt to incorporate wider areas of deprivation, do you think this is important?
    - Are you aware of other similar plans to incorporate wider areas of deprivation?
- Do you feel that the courses currently on offer are about getting non-traditional students onto mainstream courses or on separate programmes?
    - Could you please provide some examples?
- How effective are access courses (SWAP) in bringing in students who would not have been able to participate previously?
- What in your view are the main factors which would influence the success of the college's widening access schemes?
- Do you feel there are tensions between widening access and the college's need to ensure financial stability/balance the books?

The Courses on offer within the College

- In 2006-07, the subject areas with the greatest level of student activity were Family Care/Personal Development/Personal Care and Appearance (Care) and Engineering.
    - What do you feel has led to this?
    - Do you think this might change in the near future?
- College C claims to meet regional needs by providing courses in science, engineering and technology. How have the courses on offer changed in the time you have been at the college?
- Are there any particular problems with supporting part-time students, e.g. those on block release?
    - If so, what are the difficulties?

Student Support

- How does the college help students prepare for their course? For example, preparatory courses, summer school programmes, induction?
    - Do these work well? Are they better for some groups than others?
- What support is available for current students who are on courses e.g. study skills workshops, IT skill workshops, financial support, counselling?
- What are the mechanisms for students to get extra support (proactive measures by the college, lecturers)?
- Who encourages students when they appear to be struggling?
    - Who identifies if a student is in need of support?
    - Is this support on a one-to-one basis or in particular groups?
- How closely do you work with students?
- Are there any particular measures for working with disadvantaged students? E.g. access to computers of IT support?

The Local Community

- Since its formation in 2005, College C has been gradually acquiring a regional identity. How do you feel this has developed in recent years and do you feel that this has strengthened the position of the college with regards to contributing to and influencing area-wide policy/developments
- The population in the region has expanded rapidly in recent years, how do you think this will impact on the student population with regards to the age groups etc of students?

Funding Issues

- Do you think the funding the college receives influence the courses on offer by tending to favour particular course areas?
- What other issues are there surrounding funding issues for your subject department?

Government Policy

- What do you think is the main focus of the Scottish Government with regards to FE Colleges?
- Do you think that this has changed in recent years?
- Do you feel that the government provides incentives for colleges to widen access to disadvantaged groups?
- Do you feel that the government acknowledges the contribution of Scotland's colleges to workforce education, training and development?
- Drawing on your experience, how would you advise the Scottish Government regarding widening access?
- Do you anticipate any changes to the government's strategy for lifelong learning in the future?

Appendix B

Example of student focus group schedule

FOCUS GROUP TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Preamble

These focus groups are part of a PhD research project entitled 'The Role of Scotland's Colleges: Balancing Economic and Social Objectives'. The aim of this research is to explore the role Scottish colleges play in modern Scottish society. The project is examining areas such as social inclusion, widening access, changes to the college sector, the courses on offer and the students in the colleges. These focus groups will be used to gauge a deeper understanding of the student profile within the college.

With your permission, I would like to record these meeting but no names of individuals or colleges will be used in the final report. I have a consent form for you to sign to say that you are happy to proceed.

The Course

- I would like to begin by going round the group and asking which course you are on.
- Why did you choose this course (e.g. good job prospects, did you think it would be interesting, is it because it leads to HE)?
  Did anyone help you to choose the course (e.g. parents, college staff, other pupils at school)?

The College

- Why did you choose to come to this college?
  - Were you interested in any other colleges and what were your reasons for not attending them?
- How did you find out about your course? (Prospectus, school, family, friends, advertisement somewhere, mail shot)

The Student Population and Social Interaction

- How would you describe the students in this college (mainly young, older, male or female, etc.)?
- How would you describe the students on your course and do you think this matches the overall college profile?
- Do you think that the types of students who go to college now have changed from the past? In what way? (different ages, different courses...)
- Does the college encourage students to socialise in any way amongst themselves? For example: social events, having a place where students can meet, supporting organisations, e.g. for sports …

    - Are any of you involved in social groups or organisations attached to the college?
    - Is there a student union? (if yes, do you take part ..)

- How important do you feel these social aspects are to your progression through the college?
- Do you feel that colleges are good places for meeting new people and making new friends?
- Do you feel that it is important to have a group of your peers attending the same course or college?

Widening Access

- Were any of you involved in access courses to help you gain access to your current course?
  Did you find these taster sessions helpful, did they help you make a decision?
- Were any of you unable to gain entry to a certain course?
    - If so, why?

- Do you think that the college does enough to widen access to help people who might not otherwise have been able to attend college?
- Do you think it is important that colleges help people who may have not in the past been able to get a gain access to further education by providing childcare, access courses, travel costs, study support, etc.?

The Courses on Offer in the College

- Do you think that most students attend courses to develop skills and knowledge that will get them a job?
    - Or do you think they do it because they enjoy studying … or it is a way to meet new people and socialise?
    - Or do you think some students are just looking for a bursary?

- Do you feel that your course will give you new skills which will enable you to act in new ways?
    - What sort of skills do you think you will gain?

- Do you have to pay any course fees? Do you get any financial support (e.g. bursary)?
- Does the available funding influence your decision to participate on different courses?
- Do you feel that there are more opportunities (funding etc) for attending certain courses? (Such as IT, Engineering etc ..)
- Do you feel that students on block or day-release courses experience difficulties that full-time students do not?
- Do you feel that what you learn at college is relevant to the work-place?
- What do you intend to do when this course finishes?

Student Support

- Did you feel you were given adequate support to prepare for your course?

    - What, if any support did you get? Who gave you this support?
    -
- Are you aware of the student support which is on offer to you now, as a student on a course? Have you used it? If yes, how (for example, study skills support, financial guidance, careers guidance)?
- Who would you contact if you felt that you were struggling on your course?
- Would you feel comfortable approaching these people regarding personal issues which may affect your coursework?
- What are the main skills which you value most in college lecturers?
- Do you think your relationships with your tutors are important?
    - In what way?

- How do they differ from your experiences at school?
- Do you feel your course has helped develop your confidence?
    - If yes, how?

- Do you feel that doing the course has helped you to find out more about what you can do next or progress to?

The Local Community

- Are any of you members of social groups or organisations in your local community?
- Are any of you involved in any political groups in your local community?
- Do you feel that participating in college programmes increase your social opportunities outside of college?
- Did any of your parents attend college or university?
  Did that influence your decision to come to college?

- Do you know of many people from your local area who attend college or university?

Building Connections with Others

- Do you, as a result of the college course, feel more confident about approaching people from other backgrounds?
- Do you feel that participating in college programmes has encouraged you to challenge your perceptions of your own life and the lives of others?
- Do you feel that attending college has enabled you to build social connections that you were previously unable to?

Appendix C

Details of Interview Respondents

	College A	College B	College C
Senior Management	Vice Principal, Exec Dir - Creative Industries, Exec Dir - Education and Care Studies, Exec Dir - Sports, Tourism and Community Learning, Exec Dir - Business, Management and Computing, Exec Dir - Engineering, Construction and Science	Principal, Assistant Principal, Assistant Principal	Depute Principal, Associate Principal
Middle Management	Curriculum Head - Creative Industries, Curriculum Head - Education and Care Studies, Curriculum Head - Sports, Tourism and Community Learning, Curriculum Head - Business, Management and Computing, Curriculum Head - Engineering, Construction and Science, Department Manager - Professional Cookery, Department Manager - Early Education and Childcare	Head of Business, Head of Communication, English and Highers, Head of Computing, Head of Design and Construction, Head of Engineering, Head of Hospitality, Sport and Creative Arts, Head of Social and Community Studies	Head of Access and Progression, Head of Business, Head of Care, Social Sciences and Early Education, Head of Construction, Head of Creative Industries, Head of Engineering, Head of Leisure Industries, Head of Applied Science and Computing
Lecturers	Early Education and Childcare Lecturer, Catering Lecturer, Mechanical Engineering Lecturer	Senior Lecturer in Health and Social Care, Fabrication and Welding Lecturer, Business Lecturer, Sport and Exercise Lecturer	Tourism Lecturer, Electrical and Electronic Engineering Lecturer, Health Care Lecturer
Student Support Staff	Not Interviewed	Learner Services Manager	Head of Learning Resources

Appendix D

Details of Focus Group Participants

College A

Institute of Sports, Tourism and Community Learning

Male	16-24	NQ Uniformed Services
Male	16-24	NQ Uniformed Services
Female	16-24	NQ Uniformed Services
Male	Under 16	NQ Catering
Female	Under 16	NQ Catering
Male	25-59	NQ Catering
Male	25-59	NQ Introduction to Travel and Tourism
Female	25-59	NQ Introduction to Travel and Tourism

Institute of Engineering, Construction and Science

Male	16-24	NQ Mechanical Engineering
Male	16-24	NQ Mechanical Engineering
Male	16-24	NQ Mechanical Engineering
Male	16-24	HNC Fabrication, Welding and Inspection
Male	Under 16	NQ Motor Vehicle
Male	Under 16	NQ Motor Vehicle
Female	16-24	NQ Science
Female	16-24	NQ Science

College B

School of Business

Male	16-24	NQ Administration and Information Technology
Male	16-24	NQ Administration and Information Technology
Male	25-59	NQ Administration and Information Technology
Female	25-59	NQ Administration and Information Technology
Female	16-24	NQ Travel and Tourism
Female	Under 16	NQ Travel and Tourism
Male	Under 16	NQ Travel and Tourism

School of Design and Construction

Male	Under 16	Construction Skills (Pre-vocational)
Male	Under 16	Construction Skills (Pre-vocational)
Male	16-24	NQ Furniture Design and Construction
Male	16-24	NQ Furniture Design and Construction
Male	16-24	NQ Landscape Design and Construction
Female	16-24	NQ Landscape Design and Construction

College C

Department of Business

Male	16-24	NQ Introduction to Business Administration
Male	16-24	NQ Introduction to Business Administration
Male	16-24	NQ Introduction to Business Administration
Male	25-59	NQ Introduction to Business Administration
Male	25-59	NQ Introduction to Business Administration
Female	16-24	NQ Introduction to Business Administration
Female	16-24	NQ Introduction to Business Administration
Female	16-24	NQ Introduction to Business Administration
Female	16-24	NQ Introduction to Business Administration
Female	25-59	NQ Introduction to Business Administration

Department of Engineering

Male	16-24	NQ Mechanical Engineering
Male	16-24	NQ Mechanical Engineering
Male	16-24	HNC Mechanical Engineering
Male	16-24	HNC Mechanical Engineering
Male	Under 16	Pre-Apprenticeship Electrical Engineering
Male	Under 16	Pre-Apprenticeship Electrical Engineering